

# **Exploring the Links: Firearms, Family Violence and Animal Abuse in Rural Communities**

**Final Research Report to**

**The Canada Firearms Centre  
Royal Canadian Mounted Police  
Public Safety Canada**

by

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Note: Appendices not included - contact authors for more information*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Family violence in rural communities, while more openly talked about today than a few years ago, is still met with a wall of silence or denial. There is a myth shared by many that such things just don't happen in places where neighbours help each other in times of need and people wave to everyone they see. Furthermore, any suggestion that firearms can be used as means of intimidation and control in abusive homes can be difficult to explore in rural communities because firearms are a highly valued part of the rural way of life. We know that research on this topic could only have happened with the assistance of people who believe in the issues.

This research could not have been carried out without the support, cooperation, and encouragement of our research partners and many other individuals who gave us support and feedback at different stages of the process. We would like to acknowledge and thank the Executive-Directors of the all the Transition Houses in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island; Victim Services in Prince Edward Island; the Chief Firearms Officers in both provinces, the New Brunswick Coalition of Transition Houses, the Transition House Association of PEI, the New Brunswick SPCA, New Brunswick Department of Social Development (formerly Family and Community Services), and RCMP "J" Division for encouraging this research and brainstorming with us about the research instruments.

We want to thank all the staff of the transition houses and Prince Edward Island Victim Services that helped collect the survey data for us. They were the ones responsible for explaining our research to women who sought their services. They asked women whether they would participate in our survey, ensured consent forms were signed, assisted the women in completing the survey, and returned the completed forms to us on a monthly basis. They completed and returned the first part of the survey in cases where women declined to answer the second part. Without their efforts we would not have a quantitative component to our research.

The transition houses that participated were: Anderson House (Prince Edward Island), Sussex Vale Transition House, Miramichi Emergency Shelter for Women, Maison de (Passage) House, L'Escale Madavic, Maison Notre Dame House, Women in Transition House, Crossroads for Women Inc/Carrefour pour femmes Inc, Hestia House, Fundy

Region Transition House, Sanctuary House, Gignoo Transition House, Maison Serenite, and Accueil Sainte-Famille Inc. Victim Services in PEI and Fredericton City Police in NB also collected survey data.

The qualitative part of our study also is indebted to the assistance of our research partners. Our partners played a crucial role in helping us set up focus groups. They helped recruit participants, booked the venues, and distributed posters. Along with the staff at transition houses and Victim Services, our research partners also helped us locate abused rural women who were willing to share their stories with us. These focus groups and interviews gave us rich qualitative information which provides a human face to the statistics.

While we did not meet them all personally, and they must remain anonymous, we would like to acknowledge and thank the women and men who took time out from their busy schedules to participate in our focus groups.

Most importantly, we are deeply indebted to the courageous women, who also must remain anonymous, who told us their painful, yet heroic, stories of abuse, control, intimidation and fear of firearms victimization. Some also told us about how they suffered when their pets were threatened and harmed, and of the powerlessness they felt to stop the violence. It is to these women that we dedicate this research and we hope that our findings will play some part in alleviating the fear and intimidation they endured.

Of course, this research could not have happened without the financial support of the Canada Firearms Centre, for which are most grateful. We especially thank Dr. Robert Depew for his belief in this research, and his encouragement, patience and understanding during the many setbacks in data collection.

The Dean of Arts, Dr. Jim Murray, at the University of New Brunswick provided us with private office space for which we are truly appreciative. Many thanks also to the secretaries in the Sociology Department - Susan Doherty, Tricia Jarratt and Tracy McDonald – for their cheerfulness, and for helping with all sorts of administrative tasks, from booking vehicles, processing pay roll, handling phone bills and travel claims, mailing, keeping a record of expenses and finances and helping our research assistants figure how things worked.

We would also like to thank Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick (PLEIS –NB) for its assistance with various administrative tasks and for being supportive of Dr. Doherty’s participation in this study.

Finally we would like to give a special thanks to our research assistants, some of whom worked with us for only short periods of time and on very specific aspects, and others who were with us for longer periods. In alphabetical order we thank the following individuals: Emily Bell; Elizabeth Blaney; Tonya Canning; Amy Cote; Janice Fuller; Kerri Gibson; Gillian McGinnis; Brenda Norton; Melissa St. Pierre; and Sonya Smith. Thanks as well to Nadia McPhee who acted as a researcher in the preliminary stages of our proposal to undertake this research.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Despite the growing body of literature on family violence, there are few studies which deal specifically with family violence in a rural context. None have examined extensively the social and cultural context of firearms in rural homes and the impact this may have on women dealing with abuse. Yet we know from our previous research that the prevalence of firearms is a perceived threat by abused rural women. We also know that threats often extend to family pets and farm animals.

Some studies have identified the structural (socio-economic and cultural) barriers rural and farm women face in dealing with abuse. Others have identified the “characteristics” of firearms abusers and victims. Research on domestic homicide shows that a large proportion was committed with long guns, and that frequently, these deaths occurred in small towns and rural communities. The current research situates an understanding of family violence, firearms, and pet abuse within a rural context where firearms are positively valued.

This research was funded by the Canada Firearms Centre and conducted in partnership with all the transition houses in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, Victim Services in Prince Edward Island, the Chief Firearms Officers in both provinces, Victim Services of the Fredericton City Police and Codiac RCMP in New Brunswick, and the RCMP “J” Division. The major goals of the study were to:

- examine from a broad regional perspective, the various dimensions or forms in which firearms serve as instruments of control, intimidation and abuse in family violence situations;
- expand the information base on forms of firearms misuse (e.g. threats to kill the family pet or farm animals, commit suicide, harm others, and so on);
- expand the information base on firearms victimization;
- document service providers’/crisis workers’ perceptions of domestic firearms abuse and their influence on safety planning and intervention strategies;
- document rural perceptions, norms and values on the relationships between firearms, domestic violence and animal abuse;

- inform policy and program responses to the risk factors of domestic firearms abuse and violence;
- contribute to a communications plan for the benefit of, and use by, service providers who seek to protect women, children and pets from firearms threats, abuse and violence.

The objectives of the research included the following:

- collaborate with transition houses and Victims Services in New Brunswick and PEI to document risk factors that lead to, or escalate, firearms victimization of women and children in rural homes, and the awareness of women about the abuser's possible prior history of family violence and/or firearms abuse;
- examine the impact of the presence of firearms in situations of violence, threatened violence or abuse;
- share and disseminate information and knowledge on firearms and family violence to improve firearms-related policy, programs and service delivery, and develop a communications strategy, in concert with family violence organizations in NB and PEI, that flows from the research findings and issues.

The research was carried out in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island over an 18 month period. We employed a mixed methods approach, using both survey (quantitative data) and semi-structured interviews/focus groups (qualitative data). The research instruments were available in both official languages. A review of the literature on firearms misuse, family violence, and animal abuse served as a backdrop to the research. In addition, a media content analysis of newspaper coverage of the relevant issues in the Maritime Provinces helped us understand public perceptions of, and judicial response to, family violence, particularly in association with firearms. Relevant “archival materials” and the content of case law relating to firearms, domestic violence and animal abuse was analyzed over the course of the project to provide insights into the justice system's response to family violence, particularly when it involved firearms victimization and/or abuse of pets.

In total, we received 391 surveys, interviewed eleven abused women and three survey providers, and conducted seven focus groups with a total of fifty-eight participants. Two of the focus groups and one of the interviews was conducted in French. Three focus

groups took place in Prince Edward Island, and two of the interviews were with women from Prince Edward Island.

There were two parts to the survey questionnaire which was administered by transition house staff and victim services personnel. Part A asked demographic type questions, including woman's age, the community of residence, her employment status, number of children, types of abuse experienced and relationship to the abuser. Part B had specific questions about the presence and types of firearms, the presence of pets and farm animals, whether the presence of firearms made her more fearful or made her more reluctant to seek help, and whether her partner had deliberately threatened to harm the animals. In the interviews and focus groups we asked participants to talk about their perception's of rural life and rural values, the prevalence and status of firearms, the impact of firearms on women's decision-making, whether threats to animals affected women's decision-making and the sorts of barriers rural women face when disclosing or leaving an abusive relationship. We also asked the women we interviewed and focus group participants to reflect on the solutions to family violence – the policies, programs and community responses that might help other rural women experience abuse.

### **Quantitative Data – Survey Participants**

Of the 391 surveys, 283 had completed both Parts A and B. The other 108 had answered only Part A. A comparison of the two data sets shows no significant difference in the demographic characteristics of the sub-groups. Twenty percent of the surveys were received from Prince Edward Island; the other 80 percent were from New Brunswick. The women ranged in age from 16 to 75 years of age. Approximately one-third of all participants used the services of French-speaking transition houses in New Brunswick. Over 75 percent lived in rural communities (defined as being populations of 10,000 or less). A very large number, over 70 percent were unemployed, the majority of whom were receiving social assistance. Just over half of the women had children who were accompanying them to a transition house. Abuse by a common-law partner was more prevalent than abuse by a marital partner. Over 80 percent of the women had experienced two or more types of abuse.

One-quarter of the women in our survey indicated that there were firearms in their household. Of these, the vast majority, 72 percent were long guns; 16 percent had both long guns and hand guns present. Nearly 40 percent indicated that their partner did not have a license; 44 percent said the firearms were not registered; 50 percent said that the firearms were not kept locked and 11 percent indicated that the guns were kept loaded. Sixty-six percent of the women who indicated that there were firearms in their home said that knowing there were firearms made them more fearful for their safety and well-being. Seventy percent said it had an affect on their decisions about whether to tell others or seek help. Women were more likely to express concern for their safety when the firearms were not registered or locked. Eighty-three percent of the women who knew the guns were loaded indicated that they were fearful. A partner's use of drugs and alcohol, the potential of suicide, concern that one's children or family would be harmed, or oneself, were some of the reasons that women were fearful.

The majority of households had a pet or farm animal. Forty-five percent of the women said that their partner had deliberately threatened to harm their pets or farm animal and, of those, 41 percent said that their partner deliberately did harm or kill the pet. Sixty-four percent of women in homes with firearms express concern that firearms were used to harm the animal. Twenty-seven percent of the women who owned pets said that they were more reluctant to get help for fear that the abuser would harm their animal if they left. In situations where animals had been harmed, 60 percent said they were reluctant to tell others about their situation. Of women with children, 24 percent said that their child was aware that an animal had been harmed or threatened with abuse.

### **Qualitative Data – Interviews and Focus Groups**

In keeping with our participatory approach, the qualitative research was structured to provide a strong and poignant voice for New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island women who had recently experienced family violence in a rural context, as well as the service providers, crisis workers, police, social workers, child protection workers and many others, who daily come into contact with victims of abuse. Although in our survey analysis we defined what constituted a rural community or small town, participants in the qualitative research simply used descriptive terms or self-identification to share their



perceptions of life in a rural community. They told us about the characteristics that differentiate rural communities from urban areas; they spoke of rural values and discussed how these values affected people's experiences of, and responses to, family violence. Consistently, we were told about the strong, positive attachment that people in rural communities have to firearms which are associated with a long standing tradition of hunting. As a result, firearms, mostly long guns, can be found in abundance in rural homes. Participants felt that firearms ownership in both provinces is likely greater than official statistics indicate because not all owners obtain a license, and many do not register all of their firearms. They suggested that the presence of firearms in rural homes is normalized because people do not regard them as weapons, rather they point to their use for peaceful purposes. However, we also discovered that many firearms owners exhibit a cavalier attitude towards proper storage of firearms and it is not uncommon to find households where firearms are left unlocked, in easy reach of children, with ammunition on hand. One participant felt that unsafe storage has reached epidemic levels. For this reason, many participants felt that there is a widespread tendency, even by professionals, to underestimate lethality risks of abused women living in rural homes.

In light of the findings of our survey, it is not surprising that our interviews and focus groups included numerous heart-wrenching stories of firearms victimization of women, children, and pets. We learned that the presence of firearms serves to silence women, even when the threats are indirect. We learned that the fear of firearms misuse can become a community concern affecting family, neighbours and service providers who are scared to call the police when they witness abuse for fear of retaliation. We learned that when women do disclose firearms misuse to a service provider, often, there is no follow-up. We learned that many women have delayed seeking help because they were afraid their pets would be killed, abused or neglected - but there was no safe haven for the pets.

Most importantly, we learned that when women and service providers spoke about the presence of firearms in abusive homes, they did so within a broader social and cultural framework that is based on traditional family values, a submissive role for women, and stigma for women who report abuse. In addition, many of the rural women we interviewed faced other barriers and challenges including social and geographic isolation, a paucity of social services, poverty, inadequate transportation, and a lack of privacy. As well, women

expressed concerns about police response times in rural areas, the widespread use of scanners, and a general lack of trust of police and the justice system to take them seriously and to protect them if they did disclose. Other factors participants noted in relation to women's heightened fear of firearms misuse by their partners included mental health problems, threats to commit suicide, and alcohol or drug abuse. These factors were thought increase the risk of firearms victimization, particularly at times of heightened stress or crisis such as illness and unemployment.

While we recognize that these interviews and focus groups looked at the experiences of relatively small sample of rural women and service providers, 72 in total, and because the sample was not randomly chosen, we make no attempt to generalize our findings to the entire population. However, our analysis has confirmed much of what we learned in the quantitative research, and our earlier research. We are confident that the views expressed by the women, service providers and focus group participants are shared by many.

### **Recommendations**

Since this study was conducted as participatory action research, considerable attention was given to involving the participants, particularly the abused rural women we interviewed who had experienced firearms victimization in the possible solutions to firearm threats in family violence situations. Suggested solutions varied. Our recommendations incorporate the different views expressed, but we take sole responsibility for the following recommended suggestions.

- Ensure that risk assessment tools include questions about the misuse and abuse of firearms, as well as pet abuse
- Support a series of gun safety commercials targetted at rural communities and provinces
- Publicize the family violence provisions of *Firearms Act*
- Create pro-removal and pro-confiscation firearms policies similar to pro-arrest and pro-charge policies
- Confiscate firearms for unsafe storage violations

- Educate police, justice officials, and service providers on the nature and extent of firearms victimization in rural homes
- Encourage abused women to think about personal safety issues – explain risk
- Restrict firearms access on stay-away and no-contact orders, and peace bonds in all domestic cases
- Ensure follow up and support for victims following a charge and better enforcement of protective orders
- Enact legislation to compel certain professionals (mental health and doctors) to report concerns about the stability of a gun owner

Specific recommendations relating to abuse of pets and farm animals include:

- Create a public awareness education campaign about pet abuse and the risks associated with family violence and firearms
- Ensure that questions about pet-farm animal abuse are included on in-take forms and risk assessments
- Develop a safe haven program for pets and farm animals
- Provide stronger legal protections for the animals of victims of family violence
- Link animal abuse and to other forms of abuse - child abuse and senior abuse

Our general recommendations include the need for a public education initiative about the different faces of family violence, a need for a diversity of safe environments where women feel confident to disclose abuse and the importance of coordinating services and improving communication among all service providers. As well, we point to the necessity of coordinating risk assessment tools that take into account evidence-based risks such as pet abuse, and indirect fears of firearms.

## **Conclusion**

The research findings help us better understand the ways in which firearms may and do serve as instruments of control, intimidation and abuse in family violence situations. Our findings show that the normalization of firearms in rural homes in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island has led to the minimization of firearms abuse, including instances where women, children and pets/farm animals are the victims. The research and findings provide much needed information about the nature of family violence in rural communities and fill a gap in our understanding of how the presence and status of firearms influence women's decision-making. In conclusion, we believe that the study makes a significant contribution to family violence research by demonstrating that cultural factors play a critical role in understanding the nature of, and response to, firearms victimization. Dissemination of the findings will be a critical component of the success of this study.

This study has demonstrated the importance of understanding the “gun culture” in rural communities and recognizing it as a factor that must be considered in assessing risk. The qualitative findings have complemented and enhanced the quantitative data. We not only know more about the prevalence of firearms in rural homes and their association with various aspects of family violence, we can now situate firearms misuse within the social and culture context that shapes experiences and responses, and as a result, we can offer insights into potential strategies for addressing it.

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# **SECTION 1 – OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This report presents the findings of a research study which examines the social and cultural context of firearms in rural homes; a context that involves strong, positive community values around hunting, accompanied by somewhat relaxed views about gun safety. The study combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the presence and effects of firearms where actual or threatened violence towards women, children, property or animals are involved. The research grows out of the findings of our earlier studies<sup>1</sup> on family violence in farm and rural communities which flagged the prevalence of firearms in the home as a perceived threat by abused rural women (see Doherty, Hornosty & McCallum, 1997; Hornosty & Doherty, 2004; Doherty & Hornosty, 2004; Hornosty & Doherty, 2003). Many of the abused rural and farm women interviewed had reported a cycle of intimidation that was often characterized by threats of harm. In many cases, these threats extended to family pets and farm animals. We learned that long guns can and do become weapons, taking on a menacing quality that contributes to a climate of fear and control in homes that are experiencing family violence.

The rural team's findings relating to the presence of firearms and the intimidation of abused women and harm to animals in rural homes acted as a catalyst for conducting a more extensive study on these issues. We were pleased to find both a keen interest, and financial support, for this research study from the Canada Firearms Centre. There is precious little research linking firearms with such factors as rurality and family violence as a significant risk factor both in terms of victim identification and assessment of lethality of threats.<sup>2</sup> The current study is intended to bridge this gap by analyzing the ways in which firearms may and/or do serve as instruments of control, intimidation and abuse in domestic violence situations. More specifically, the study explores the presence of firearms in

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<sup>1</sup> This research was conducted by the research team, Family Violence on the Farm and in Rural Communities. The team was comprised of academic researchers, community researchers, a farmwoman, RCMP, and social service providers. The published articles reflect the analysis of Drs Doherty and Hornosty. The "Rural Research Team" is a team of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre on Family Violence Research, established in 1994 to engage in participatory action research to end violence against women.

<sup>2</sup> Woodbridge, M (nd.), A Deadly Relationship: Violent Intimates and Available Firearms, Available on the World Wide Web [http://www.psrla.org.FS-Violent\\_intimates.html](http://www.psrla.org.FS-Violent_intimates.html).

abusive homes and the nature of firearms abuse to determine if there is a link to women's responses, including fear, perceptions of risk, and decisions to seek help or safety. Based on the well-know risk factors identified in family violence research, we also included questions that would enable us to relate the presence of firearms to other variables including threats to kill or harm a woman, her children, pets/farm animals and threats of suicide, as a means of control. Our quantitative research was designed to help us identify whether specific factors, such as age, cohabitation status, employment status and residency, could in fact be associated with higher levels of firearms misuse.

An important aspect of our qualitative research is situating the research within a paradigm that identifies the broader cultural context of, and risk factors for, firearms misuse and violence in rural settings. As a result, our qualitative data enables us to explore the ways in which "rural life" and the "gun culture" in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island impact on abused rural women. Ultimately, this contributes to our understanding of how to mitigate the potential for lethal outcomes.

The report also includes three components that are intended to help us understand public perceptions of, and judicial response to, family violence, particularly in association with firearms. A review of the literature on firearms misuse, family violence, and animal abuse served as a backdrop to the research as well as a frame of reference for the articulation of the project's research questions and issues. In addition, a selection of newspaper articles about firearms and domestic violence were analyzed for pertinent themes and to explore the presentation of domestic violence issues in the mass media. Finally, relevant "archival materials" and the content of case law relating to firearms, domestic violence and animal abuse was analyzed over the course of the project to provide insights into the justice systems response to family violence, particularly when it involved firearms victimization and/or abuse of pets.

The findings in this report are intended to enhance approaches to crime prevention, firearms investigations, court sanctions, and safer communities. Our research used a participatory action approach which engaged the participants in identifying solutions and making recommendations about what policies, procedures and strategies might improve the safety of rural women, their children and pets. We strongly believe these findings will aide in the development of better-informed intervention policies, programs, and strategies

designed to foster greater safety for women and others victimized by firearms in rural communities. Finally, we believe that the findings of the study will be significant in addressing several of the Canada Firearms Centre's priorities including educating the public, improving service to the public, identifying and reducing firearms safety risks and crime, maximizing the cost effectiveness and efficiency of program and service delivery, and expanding our knowledge base on the range and diversity of firearms misuse and victimization in rural communities.

### **Need for the Study**

Few studies have attempted to link the abuser's threats to harm his partner, her children, her family, property, and pets or farm animals, to factors associated with rural or urban residence or cultural norms. Although some studies have identified "characteristics" of abusers and victims (Tutty, 1999; Dansys, 1992), they have not explored how shared values and norms of a group of people give meaning to their experiences of victimization, serving to shape their identities and responses. In addition, few studies have examined the presence of firearms in the home and the lethality of the threats. In fact, despite the growing body of family violence literature, there are very few studies dealing specifically with family violence in a rural context. The existing research does not examine the variables that we found emerging in clusters or patterns in our research in rural New Brunswick. Although firearms lethality risk is sometimes linked to particular variables such as low-income or unemployment (Campbell, 2003; Vacha & McLaughlin, 2004), most studies that examine the link between family violence and firearms typically did not factor in geography as a variable, perhaps reflecting their urban-centric focus (See Azrael & Hemenway, 2000; McFarlane et al., 1998; Saltzman et al., 1992; Sorenson & Wiebe, 2004). In one study of intimate partner violence and homicides in United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, the authors note, "...in rural areas of both the developing and the developed world, violence experienced by women at the hands of their intimate partners may even be worse than the situation we glean from our urban-based studies of this phenomenon" (Se'ver, Dawson, & Johnson, 2004).

Statistics demonstrate that 34% of women killed by their spouses in Canada are shot and that almost half (49%) of these homicides occur in rural areas (Hung, 1999).

Moreover, a large proportion of these homicides were committed with long guns (Hung, 1999). A study of domestic homicides in New Brunswick between 1984 and 2005 revealed that 46% of the women were killed with a firearm (Doherty, 2006), and nearly 70% of these deaths occurred in small towns and rural locations (i.e., areas with populations of less than 10,000). This should not be surprising, as research demonstrates that homes with firearms are much more likely to become dangerous and more lethal for women (Canada Firearms Centre, 1998). Although we must exercise caution in extrapolating family violence risk from homicide data, the strong correlation between highest firearms ownership rates and the highest rates of firearms deaths from homicide, suicide and accident is well documented (Kellerman et al, 1993; Hung, 2000; Canadian Paediatric Society, 2005).

Although rural homes account for only 20% of the Canadian population<sup>3</sup>, they are much more likely than urban homes to have firearms present suggesting that abused rural women are at greater risk of being harmed with firearm than are women experiencing family violence in an urban area. Statistics also reveal that long guns are more prevalent in rural residences than handguns. Gun ownership varies among the regions of Canada, from 14% owning at least one gun in Ontario, to 36% in New Brunswick, 20% in Prince Edward Island, and 69% in the Territories<sup>4</sup>. While New Brunswick has one of the highest firearms ownership rates among the provinces, it also has one of the highest rate of firearms deaths from homicide, suicide and accident (Canada Firearms Centre, 1998).

As noted in the introduction, there were also a number of findings by the rural research team that predicated this research. These include:

- Abused rural women confront numerous barriers such as geographic and social isolation, lack of access to transportation, and community values that encourage women to return to the abuser (Hornosty & Doherty, 2000; see also Jiwani, 1998).
- Data from New Brunswick indicate that a higher percentage of women in rural areas struggle with low literacy, lack of education and marginal employment skills when compared to women in urban areas.
- Extremely high rates of unemployment and seasonal employment in rural New Brunswick, coupled with poverty, low literacy rates, and lack of access to training

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<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, Canada Census, 2001

<sup>4</sup> International comparisons show that Canada is in the mid-range of gun ownership with about 26% of Canadians owning a firearm, compared to the United States where firearms ownership is about 48%. Source: *Kwing Hung (2000), Firearm Statistics (Supplementary Tables). Research and Statistics Division, Department of Justice.*

and educational opportunities, are factors that create significant risks and barriers for rural women leaving abusive relationships (Doherty & Hornosty, 2003)

- The constellation of economic and social factors in rural areas, in combination with the rapid decline in services and programs, may set the stage for potentially lethal outcomes for abused rural women.
- There is a strong conservative rural ethos that minimizes and normalizes male dominance and violence in the home, and tends to blame the victim for not being submissive or promoting harmony (Hornosty & Doherty, 2004).
- The presence of guns in the home was generally identified as a particular concern and problem for abused rural women (Doherty & Hornosty, 2003). Moreover, many of the abused rural and farm women interviewed reported a cycle of intimidation that was often characterized by threats of harm. In many cases, these threats extended to family pets and farm animals
- Women themselves reported that they sometimes delayed seeking assistance or going to a transition house because of concern for the safety of their pets. Information sessions conducted with New Brunswick crisis workers and police revealed anecdotal stories of women whose partners had harmed or killed the family pet.
- Service providers who work with rural families experiencing conflict and violence are concerned about ready access to firearms in the home and the potential for situations to turn deadly (Hornosty & Doherty, 2005).

### **The Significance of Culture**

In this report we use the word “culture” in specific reference to the culture surrounding rural life, firearms and hunting. In order to elucidate our use of the phrase “gun culture” it is important to discuss what we mean by culture in general. Terry Eagleton (2000) writes that “‘culture’ is said to be one of the two or three most complex words in the English language.” Despite this complexity, there are a few basic things that can be said about culture to help our understanding. Schwartz and Ewald (1968: 5-6, italics in original) provide this explanation of culture:

*Human behaviour is cultural behaviour. With some consistent variation a human is a product of his culture – his behaviour is based largely upon the cultural system into which he is born and in which he is raised and lives. The behaviour of the human individual cannot be explained or completely understood apart from the culture in which he lives.*

This explanation emphasizes the significant relationship between culture and individual human behaviour. Individual actions are not purely a product of that individual's choosing, but instead these actions are greatly influenced by the culture that surrounds and is a part of an individual.

Culture also refers to the norms and values of a society, particularly in terms of "related ideas and expressible patterns" (Kroeber, 1952: 107). This explanation of culture looks at the products of human culture in addition to the ideas and actions of members of that culture. For our purposes, culture can be seen as a sort of cyclical process, being in some ways both the cause and effect of human actions.

The concept of culture, according to Geertz (1973) is predominantly "semiotic." By this he means that the study of culture is "not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz, 1973: 5). In these terms, human culture cannot be studied in the same way as the natural world; instead, we must develop interpretations of possible meaning rather than attempt to develop universal laws. Geertz (1973: 5) also provides a valuable metaphor for culture, saying that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" and culture itself is in fact these webs. Again we see that culture is a complex combination of the product and the process of human existence.

It is easy when discussing culture to see it as an external force or something that exists outside of everyday life. Jacobs and Hanrahan (2005: 1) address this problem when they write that culture should be seen "not primarily as a distinct or overarching system of belief, but as something more pervasive and integral to everyday life – indeed, as the very medium of lived experience." Here they provide the important insight that in any sort of sociological analysis, the structures and theories we conceptualize to better understand the world should not be too far abstracted from the everyday experiences of the people under consideration.

When we talk about any type of culture, it is also important to remember that while there are certain similarities amongst those who belong in a culture, it does not necessitate homogeneity. In fact, there are often many variances between the members of a particular culture. Cohen (1985: 20) discusses this when he writes, "the 'commonality' which is found in community need not be a uniformity. It does not clone behaviour or ideas. It is a

commonality of forms (ways of behaving) whose content (meanings) may vary considerably among its members.” Thus we see that while certain types of behaviours in a particular culture may appear to have similar meaning to an outsider, there is a tacit knowledge held by those who belong to a culture that allows them to understand the subtle differences in the meanings of their actions.

Adam Kuper (1999) speaks to the problem that arises in the study of culture when culture itself is treated as a source of explanation. He writes that, “Appeals to culture can offer only a partial explanation of why people think and behave as they do, and of what causes them to alter their ways.” (Kuper, 1999). This is an important point when talking about culture because even though it is very influential in terms of people’s behaviour, it is important not to exclude other factors such as a person’s agency when trying to understand a social situation.

When talking about “gun culture” in particular, there is often reference to the traditions that have been passed on for generations in rural communities. Benedict (1934) addresses this when she talks about “the enormous role of the cultural process of the transmission of tradition.” While tradition is not the only aspect of importance in most gun culture, as we discuss in this report, it is an important aspect of any culture, particularly those that are conservative in nature. From this brief discussion of culture the reader will be better able to conceptualize what we are talking about when we use the phrase “gun” or “hunting culture.”

### **The Study Area: A Snapshot of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island**

This study was conducted in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, both of which may be described as largely rural provinces because a significant portion of the population lives in rural areas. According to the 2001 Census, “rural population” refers to those who live in small towns, villages and other populated places with less than 1,000 population, agricultural lands, or remote and wilderness areas. (Statistics Canada, Census Dictionary, 2001.) The majority of Canadians live in urban centres, and that proportion is growing. In 2001, 80% of the country's population resided in cities, up from 78% in 1996. The rural share of the population dropped from 22% to 20% in the same period, as did the actual number of residents. Canada is becoming increasingly urban, and that trend is



reflected in the Atlantic Provinces, though the rural share of the population is much greater there. In 1996, 56% of Prince Edward Island's population of 134,557 lived in rural areas, but that had dropped slightly to 55% of its 135,294 person population in 2001. During the same period, New Brunswick's rural population had dropped from 51% of its 738,133 inhabitants, to 50% of 729,498 inhabitants. In contrast, Ontario saw a drop from 17% to 15% of its population in rural areas, and Quebec saw a drop from 22% to 20% (Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1851-2001, 2001).

Just as rural populations are shrinking, so are farm populations. In 1996, 819,095 rural Canadians lived on farms compared to 695,750 in 2001 (Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 2001). That is a drop from 12.9% to 11.5% of Canada's rural farm population in those five years. During the same period, the rural farm population on Prince Edward Island dropped from 7,780 to 5,940, or from 10.4% to 8% of the rural population. New Brunswick's rural farm numbers saw a similar decline, dropping from 2.7% to 2.2%, or from 10,055 to 7,920 (Statistics Canada, Censuses of Agriculture and Population, 2001). Although farm numbers may be diminishing, women's share of employment is increasing. The total number of farm operators in New Brunswick fell from 3,895 in 2001 to 3,695 in 2006 - a drop of 5.1%. The number of women operators increased from 18.1% of the total number to 20.8%. The same trend exists in Prince Edward Island. While the total number of operators dropped 4.9% in that period, women's share increased from 14.7% of 2,455 operators to 17.1% of 2,335 operators.

On Prince Edward Island, 54.2% of all female operators were in non-farm work, compared with 41.5% of their male counterparts. In New Brunswick, 43.3% of women did non-farm work, compared with 49.2% of the men. Nationally, 45.6% of the women having earned wages outside of the farm, compared with 44.2% of the men (Statistics Canada, Agriculture Census, Profile of Atlantic Canada's Farm Operators, 2001). Women tended to work fewer hours per week on the farm than did men. 54% of men worked more than forty hours on the farm per week, compared with just over 30% for women. Only 21% of men worked fewer than twenty hours on the farm, while nearly 40% of women did so. Of all the men with off-farm work, 46% worked more than forty hours off the farm, while 23% of women did the same. Statistics Canada notes that these figures do not take into account the

mostly-female domain of unpaid family labour that is essential to the success of the farm (Statistics Canada, Agriculture Census, A Profile of Female Farm Operators, 2001).

The incomes from non-farm work have become increasingly important the past few decades. In 1980, 21.5% of families on unincorporated farms earned 75% or more of their total income from net farm income, and over one third relied on it for more than half of their total family incomes. By 2000, only 7% of farms depended on the farm for 75% of their total income. The difference has been made up in wage paying jobs (averaged 47.4% of farm income in 1980 and jumped to 56.7% in 2000) and income from the government (increased from 5.8% to 10.8% over the same period). (Statistics Canada, Agricultural Census, Income of Farm Families, 2001).

Rural populations on the decline nation-wide, but rural incomes are making some gains, especially in the Atlantic Provinces. Average income in Canada's predominately rural regions amounted to \$19,491 in 2000; up 25.7% from 1980 (Statistics Canada notes that all income data are per capita and adjusted for inflation). Atlantic Canada ranked first in terms of rural income growth over the two decades with New Brunswick in the lead with a 39.8% gain over twenty years. Still, its average rural income of \$18,200 puts it behind the 2000 rural average for Canada. It also trailed average urban earnings by \$2,220, though this gap is slightly smaller than in 1980. The rural populations in each of the other Atlantic Provinces had average income gains of over one-third, but no other province in the region managed to narrow the urban-rural income gap as New Brunswick had. However, all of rural Canada saw a decrease of average incomes that fell below Statistics Canada low-income cutoff, from 16% in 1980 to 14% in 2000. The same period saw an increase from 16% to 18% in urban areas (Statistics Canada, Study: Rural-Urban income gap, 2004).

Atlantic Canada has fewer people employed in agriculture than any other section in the goods-producing sector, save for utilities. In 2006, New Brunswick reported 6,200 people employed in agriculture, or 8% of all of those employed in the goods-producing sector, and 1.7% of the number of people employed in total. In contrast, in Prince Edward Island, agricultural employees make up 21% of the goods-producing sector and 6% of all workers provincially. Canada-wide, agricultural workers make up 8.7% of the goods-producers, and 2% of the total work force. Everywhere in the country, the service sector provides the majority of jobs, with trades and health care overwhelmingly dominating that

field. These two sectors employ more people by almost double any other field, and this is true across the country (Statistics Canada, Distribution of Employed Labour, 2006).

Besides farming, one employment sector seems to lag considerably in rural areas compared to urban ones. The culture sector, which is broadly defined as creative artistic activity and the preservation of heritage, employs less than 4% of the country's total workforce, but less than 3% of the rural workforce. Statistics Canada places special importance on cultural sector work, noting that it raises the quality of life in its region, while contributing to its attractiveness for tourists, investors and boosting its economic prosperity. This gap between the urban and rural cultural sector suggests a greater difference in quality of life than can be reflected with only income levels (Statistics Canada, Study: Cultural Sector Employment in Rural Canada, 2006).

There is an income gap between rural and urban residents of the Atlantic Provinces, but all residents lag behind the rest of Canada. The gap is reflected in every education bracket. While the average income in Canada in 2001 was \$31,757, in New Brunswick it was \$24,971 and in Prince Edward Island it was \$22,303. Those without high school diplomas earned an average of \$21,230 nation-wide, but only \$17,074 and \$15,058 in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island respectively. Canadian university graduates could expect to earn an average of \$48,648, but that number dropped to \$40,375 and \$37,063 for those who chose to work in either New Brunswick or Prince Edward Island (Statistics Canada, Census of Population, Average Earnings of the Population, 2001).

In 2003, Statistics Canada released literacy statistics that put Atlantic Canadians below the national average in terms of their ability to read. Those with Level 1 literacy are characterized as having great difficulty reading and are usually aware that they have a problem. Those with Level 2 can read, but only as long as the material is simple and clearly laid out, and are not capable of meeting requirements set for most jobs. As of 2003, the national average for those with literacy levels 1 and 2, ages 16 and older, was 48% (20% Level 1 and 28% Level 2). The average in Atlantic Canada was 51% (21% Level 1 and 30% Level 2). Within Atlantic Canada, Prince Edward Island had a combined 50% (20% Level 1 and 30% Level 2), while New Brunswick averaged a combined 56% (23% Level 1 and 33% Level 2). (International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, 2003).

## 1.2 Background to the Research

### Goals of the Study

The main goal of this study was to examine, from a broad regional perspective, the various dimensions or forms in which firearms serve as instruments of control, intimidation, and abuse in family violence situations. In addition, we attempted to understand how the presence of firearms in a situation of abuse shapes women's decision-making. More specific goals included:

- (i) expanding the information base on forms of firearms misuse (e.g. threats to kill the family pet or farm animals, commit suicide, harm others, and so on);
- (ii) expanding the information base on firearms victimization;
- (iii) documenting service providers'/crisis workers' perceptions of domestic firearms abuse and their influence on safety planning and intervention strategies;
- (iv) documenting rural perceptions, norms and values on the relationships between firearms, domestic violence and animal abuse;
- (v) informing policy and program responses to the risk factors of domestic firearms abuse and violence;
- (vi) contributing to a communications plan for the benefit of, and use by, service providers who seek to protect women, children and pets from firearms threats, abuse and violence.

The objectives of the research included:

- (i) collaborating with transition houses and Victims Services in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island to document risk factors that lead to, or escalate, firearms victimization of women and children in rural homes, and the awareness of women about the abuser's possible prior history of family violence and/or firearms abuse;
- (ii) examining the impact of the presence of firearms in situations of violence, threatened violence or abuse;
- (iii) sharing and disseminating information and knowledge on firearms and family violence to improve firearms-related policy, programs and service delivery, and develop a communications strategy, in concert with family violence organizations in NB and PEI, that flows from the research findings and issues

## **Partners and Stakeholders**

There were a number of partners and stakeholders who participated in the research and made this study possible. Many of our research partners assisted in identifying research questions and developing the data collection instruments. Others participated in administering the survey, helping us to set up focus groups, and recruiting women for interviews. They included:

- The 14 transition houses in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, who collected survey data, namely, Anderson House, Sussex Vale Transition House, Miramichi Emergency Shelter for Women, Maison de (Passage) House, L'Escale Madavic, Maison Notre Dame House, Women in Transition House, Crossroads for Women Inc/Carrefour pour femmes Inc, Hestia House, Fundy Region Transition House, Sanctuary House, Gignoo Transition House, Maison Serenite, and Accueil Sainte-Famille Inc.;
- Victim Services in Prince Edward Island;
- Victim Services of the Fredericton City Police and Codiac RCMP in New Brunswick;
- The New Brunswick Coalition of Transition Houses and the Transition House Association of Prince Edward Island;
- The Chief Firearms officers for both provinces;
- The RCMP – J-Division
- Participants at our research meetings who represented various government departments.

This study would not have been possible without the financial support of the Canada Firearms Centre.

### **1.3 Methodology: The Research Tools**

The initial phase of the research involved four meetings with various stakeholders and potential research participants to explain the research and ascertain their willingness to participate (see Appendices A and B for examples of letters sent to stakeholders to invite their participation in this project). In total, all thirteen transition houses in New Brunswick, the New Brunswick Coalition of Transition Houses, the transition house in Prince Edward Island, the Chief Firearms officers for both provinces, provincial victim services in Prince Edward Island, as well as victim services associated with the Fredericton City Police and the RCMP “J” Division agreed to help with various parts of the data collection. These initial meetings were also used to secure feedback on the proposed research questions and information on the best methods for collecting the data. Getting this input on the research instruments was critical, as the draft survey questionnaires and focus group questions were then revised based on the feedback we received before they were submitted for research ethics approval. The transition house representatives encouraged us to convert the information letter into a colourful, plain language brochure and to prepare posters for them to put on the walls at their shelters. They felt that getting the women to read the formal letter would be difficult, but the brochure might peak their interest and open the door for a staff person to invite them to participate in the survey. These brochures and posters have been a valuable mechanism for recruiting participants and one that we would recommend to other researchers.

The months following the stakeholders meetings were spent on obtaining feedback from the research partners, revising the research tools, and preparing all the materials necessary to ensure research ethics approval from both the Department of Sociology Research Ethics Committee and the University’s Research Ethics Board. The application form (see Appendix C) for research approval required finalized versions of the research instruments, consent forms, debriefing letters, information brochures, posters to be used for recruiting participants (see Appendices D-R), as well as a detailed explanation of how confidentiality of the participants would be maintained (see Appendix S).

Research ethics approval was received in October 2005. All required research materials were then translated into French and copies were printed. An instructional manual for those who would administer the survey questionnaire was also developed,

translated and printed (see Appendix T). We then worked with a graphic artist to modify the research instruments as information brochures for abused women and service providers, so that the study could be easily explained (see Appendices L and M). Once all materials were printed, the training manuals, research materials, and Purolator return envelopes were distributed to all research partners. Lock boxes were also purchased and distributed upon request to eight transition houses so that they could secure data and ensure confidentiality.

The survey data collection began in November 2005 and took place over a twelve month period. Participants were recruited from transition houses and victims services, as well as from other external locations. In an attempt to recruit participants who did not utilize the transition houses or victim services, posters and public service announcements were created in both English and French. The posters (see Appendix R) were distributed with cover letters explaining the study (see Appendix U) to strategic locations around both provinces, such as libraries, police stations, daycares, veterinarian offices, doctors' offices. Public service announcements (see Appendix V) were run on CBC radio, in the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women's Newsletter, and in a number of regional publications. These publications included *Le Madawaska*, *La Rebulique*, *The Argosy*, *The Miramichi Leader*, and the *Diocesan Datebook*. As a result, the women interviewed eventually came from a variety of sources.

Our methodology was based on a mixed methods approach, using both survey (quantitative data) and interviews/focus groups (qualitative data). This approach allowed for greater confidence and overlap in the findings. In addition, the research was informed by a feminist perspective, along with a commitment to action-oriented and collaborative strategies. This perspective provided us with the ability to acquire a better understanding of each woman's experience in the context of her life in a rural community.

### **Quantitative Data Collection**

The quantitative component consisted of a survey (see Appendix D) administered by transition house staff and victim services personnel. All women entering transition houses in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, as well as those who sought out the assistance of victim services, were given the information brochure about the project (either

in English or French; see Appendix L) by a staff member. Since we were aware that the literacy levels are low in both provinces, we asked the staff to sit with the women in a private location and read through the brochure, which outlined the nature of the survey and our research, asked for their participation by participating in the survey. The brochure also made it clear that their participation was voluntary and that all information gathered was confidential and of a statistical nature.

Those who agreed to take part in the survey were first given a consent form (see Appendix I) to sign, then had the questionnaire (see Appendix D) administered by a staff member. There were two main parts to the survey. Part A referred to background information, including the women's community of residence, employment status, marital status, number of children, and type(s) of abuse experienced. Part B had specific questions about the presence and types of firearms, the presence of pets, whether the presence of firearms made her more fearful or made her more reluctant to seek help, and whether her partner had deliberately threatened to harm the pets or farm animals. The final question asks respondents who indicated either that they had pets or lived in home with firearms whether they would be willing to share their story in a confidential interview.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month, the completed surveys were couriered to us in a confidential Purolator envelope. Upon completion of the data collection, a total of 413 questionnaires were returned of which 22 were blank. The information from each survey was entered into SPSS (version 13.0), and was coded using 73 variables. The information collected was then analyzed using frequencies and cross tabulations, as the numbers were too small to run any significance tests. During data analysis, the principal investigators decided that a more accurate representation of the participants was found when participants who only who had not participated in Part B of the survey were removed from the data set. As a result, the data was analyzed based on two data sets: the total sample of 391 and all those who answered all parts of the survey (283). For the purpose of reporting, information regarding the data sets with 391 participants and 283 participants were included in the quantitative section of this report.



## **Qualitative Data Collection**

Qualitative data was collected through focus group discussions and individual interviews with abused women and service providers. The interviewees included women who had participated in the survey, and who said that their partner had firearms and/or had threatened/harmed the pets or farm animals, as well as women who saw our poster and called to participate, and service providers whom we invited to participate. A semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix F) was used to ensure participants were able to voice their story in their own words, but to also guarantee that key points were raised during the interview. The individual interviews enabled us to elicit background information on the interviewee's current situation, their community of residence and how they define it, and how the presence of firearms and/or pets/farm animals impacts on women's decision-making. Following a participatory feminist approach, we not only asked women about their experiences of abuse, we also encouraged them to explore solutions and make recommendations about how to improve the situation.

A total of fourteen individual interviews were conducted; eleven with abused women (10 English and 1 French) and three with service providers. All focus groups and individual interviews were taped using two different recorders - a main recorder and a backup. The tapes were then transcribed into a Word document. In order to ensure participants' confidentiality, we used pseudonyms for our interview participants. The women we interviewed chose their own name (pseudonym) for the purposes of the interview, following a pattern explained to them by the interviewer. In addition, the interviewees were informed that the names of all the individuals they mentioned during the interview would also be changed in any papers or reports and no identifying information would be used. The interview tapes are labeled with the participant's pseudonym and the tapes are kept locked at all times. Consent forms have been retained separately under lock by those who administered the survey.

There were also seven focus groups conducted in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, with a total of fifty-eight participants. The purpose of the focus groups was to elicit a broader community perspective on some of the issues. The participants represented a range of community service providers, most working with victims of abuse, including: victim service workers, crisis workers, counselors, child protection workers,

social workers, outreach workers, and police officers. A few focus groups also included abused women, as well as general members of the community. Open-ended questions (see Appendix E) were used to explore participants' perceptions of rural life and rural values, the unique barriers rural or farm women face when disclosing and/or leaving an abusive relationship, whether firearms pose special risks in some circumstances, the behaviors people associate with family violence, and whether concern for animal safety affects women's decisions in abusive situations. We also asked participants to reflect on the solutions to family violence – the policies, programs and community responses that might help other rural women experiencing abuse.

In total, we heard from seventy-two individuals in our qualitative component. The first step in the qualitative data analysis involved creating specific nodes in the qualitative software program QSR NVivo 7. Nodes are simply descriptors for specific themes, and themes for this project mainly arose from the questions asked as part of the interview guide. An example of a theme that arose from the responses to one of the questions on the interview guide is *Experiences with accessing services*. Other themes emerged from the interview transcripts. The next step was to code the data. This involved highlighting and depositing passages from transcripts into relevant nodes. Coding facilitated the thematic grouping and organizing of passages from all transcripts at each specific node. The interview and focus group transcripts were first individually imported into the program, and then coded for recurring and contrasting themes. Finally, once the coding of the data set was complete, researchers were able to review and analyze all of the passages that were coded at each node.

The qualitative method thus provided us with insight into women's experiences - their perceptions of the situation expressed in their own voices. In addition, the qualitative information collected provided a more holistic picture of the concerns and challenges faced by women who are abused by their partners. An important aspect of our research has always been to give primacy to the voices of abused rural and farm women. As researchers, we have gained new insight into the systemic barriers which they have encountered in attempting to disclose their situations or leave the abuse (see Hornosty & Doherty, 2004; Doherty & Hornosty, 2004; Hornosty & Doherty, 2003).

Clearly, the findings provide insight into the experiences of only a small sample of rural women and service providers. As a result, and because the sample was not randomly chosen, we make no attempt to generalize our findings to the entire population. However, we are confident that the views expressed are shared by many, especially since they confirm much of what we learned from abused women and service providers in our earlier research. Moreover, we believe that this research invites further exploration into the specific risk factors affecting rural and farm women, including firearms abuse, violence or threats of violence towards pet/farm animals, and the ways that these factors contribute to, or escalate, firearms victimization of women and children in rural homes.

### **Research Challenges**

As with any research study, we confronted a number of challenges in implementing and completing this study. Initially, we had planned to meet with all the stakeholders at one time. However, this was not possible, for a variety of reasons, including the competing schedules of the French and English transition houses in New Brunswick. Consequently, we needed to arrange four separate meetings – a French and English information session in New Brunswick and two meetings in Prince Edward Island. This contributed considerably to our expenses for travel and meetings which depleted our entire travel budget. This meant that we could not hold a training meeting and bring all of the staff who would be administering the surveys together to learn their roles. Instead, we created an instruction manual, which meant that we had to rely on individuals to read it and follow the steps. As surveys were submitted over the first few months, we could see that there were some issues that we needed to address because of different interpretations of the instructions.

Another issue we encountered was that Victim Services in New Brunswick was unable to participate. As a result, we had to approach the police-based victim services. In addition, other partners/stakeholders who had originally agreed to participate chose not to do so for a number of reasons: (a) the Prince Edward Island Outreach workers withdrew from the study as they felt their heavy workloads did not provide them the proper time to administer the surveys; (b) some New Brunswick transition houses were struggling with funding and staffing issues, so that some months they did not find time to do the surveys; (c) staff turn-over at some transition houses resulted in survey data only being collected for

a few months, and (d) the Victim Services in Prince Edward Island, which was meticulously collecting data, withdrew after the first six months because of the time involved in participating. Finally, we should point out that the New Brunswick Coalition of Transition Houses, which has been a strong partner and instrumental in recruiting the crisis community as a stakeholder in the research, lost its funding from the Status of Women. This, in turn affected its ability to coordinate and ensure that transition houses stayed on track. As a result, the amount of survey data collected was less than expected. This also negatively affected the amount of assistance that we received from the transition houses in setting up focus groups and recruiting interviewees

In light of these and other challenges, we were unable to meet some of our data collection goals. We had originally intended to conduct approximately thirty individual interviews, as well as six interviews with service providers. We did not have the response to the toll-free line that we expected, despite our recruiting efforts. Finding a full-time research coordinator and research assistants was a challenge, as bilingual staff were required in order to operate the toll-free research line, communicate with French research partners, and assist with interviews and focus groups in both languages. Moreover, the various research assistants we hired, many of them students, had significant time limitations to work on this project due to academic demands. We also were unable to recruit a full-time research coordinator to follow up with research partners or to contact police and victim services to have them recruit participants for us.

A related challenge we encountered was establishing contact with potential interviewees. Women who took the survey could indicate that they would like to be interviewed. However, the survey forms were only courier to the research office once a month, so by the time we learned that a woman was interested in talking with us, she most likely would have left the shelter. Since the consent forms are kept separate from the survey, we had no way of knowing who these women were. After calling the transition house workers who had completed the questionnaire with the participant, we were still unable to locate several potential interviewees, due to the following factors: (a) the house worker could not remember who the particular woman was, or (b) the woman had left the transition house and her location was unknown. To remedy this we sent an email to participating houses and crisis centers, which suggested: (a) flagging the consent form of a

woman who expresses interest in being interviewed, and (b) telephoning our toll free number immediately once the house worker and participant have completed the interview. Furthermore, we also encouraged participants to contact us if they had any additional suggestions.

We also experienced some challenges with the focus groups. We had originally expected that our research partners would play a greater role in helping to set up local focus groups, although generally, this was not the case. The winter weather also had an effect on scheduling. For example, a focus group was scheduled for February in Miramichi, but it had to be cancelled because of a storm. This focus group was rescheduled for March, but only one person attended. We then decided to conduct a service provider interview with this individual.

## **SECTION 2 – QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS: THE SURVEY**

### **2.1 Quantitative Data Collection**

Quantitative data were collected to give us a better understanding of the prevalence of firearms in abusive homes, and the impact this had on women living in abusive relationships in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. As part of the data collection process, we sought the assistance of transition house staff and victim services in both provinces to ask women who contacted them whether they would be willing to participate in a survey. All thirteen transition houses in New Brunswick as well as the one transition house in Prince Edward Island participated in the study. In addition, Victim Services in Prince Edward Island assisted us in collecting the data.

A decision was made to collect quantitative data for a twelve month period to ensure that we covered different seasons, since there often is a pattern to transition house usage. Data from the NB Transition Houses 2005-2006 activities report shows that usage is highest in July and March. (New Brunswick Family and Community Services, 2006). Given that New Brunswick is an officially bilingual province, and that four of the transition houses in the province primarily serve the Francophone community, the survey questionnaire was available in both French and English.

In total 413 surveys were returned. Of these, 391 contained some relevant information. Twenty-two of the surveys were returned with either no information or with just the name of the house on the survey. 311 of the surveys (79.5 percent) were from New Brunswick; 80 (or 20.5 percent) were from Prince Edward Island. According to information reported from New Brunswick Family and Community Services in 2006, 916 women used the services of transition houses in that twelve month period. Using this figure, it appears that our response rate for New Brunswick was 34 percent; 82 percent of whom completed both parts of the survey. This number was somewhat less than we had hoped for since initially all executive directors of the transition houses and the Victim Services in Prince Edward Island were supportive of the research. However, for a number of reasons beyond our control some of the transition houses were able to participate and collect the data for only six months. Others sent surveys only intermittently.

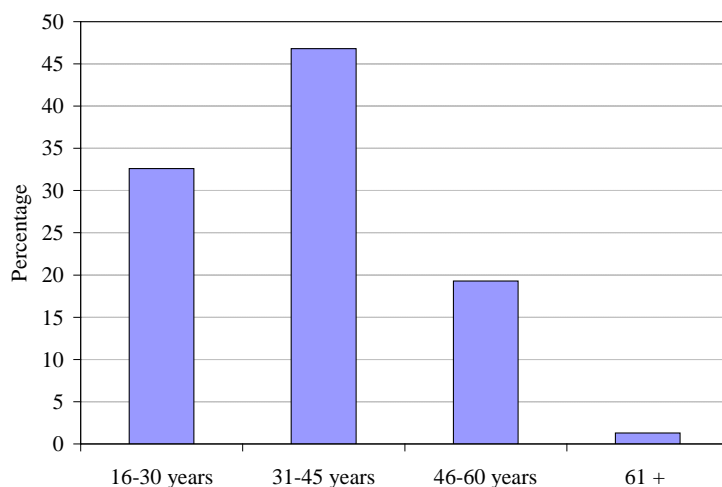
## 2.2 Demographic Profiles of the 391 Participants

All thirteen transition houses in New Brunswick and the one transition house as well as Victim Services in Prince Edward Island were partners in collecting quantitative data<sup>5</sup>. As discussed further below, just over 70 percent of the returned surveys had data for both parts of the questionnaire. The other 28 percent had only completed Part A of the survey which pertained to demographic factors, such as age of the women, residence, employment status, number of children, nature of abuse, number of separations and reasons for using transition house or other crisis services. Indicated below is the demographic profile of all the participants. In the next section, the two groups – those for whom we have only demographic information and those who completed the entire survey- are compared.

### Age of the Women

Information for the women in the survey indicates that they ranged in ages from 16 years to 75 years. Graph 1 below has combined the more detailed age distribution into four broad age categories. As illustrated nearly half of the women and the largest percentage (47 percent) were in the 31- 45 age category.

**Graph 1: Distribution of Women by Broad Age Categories.**



<sup>5</sup> This provides us with a fairly representative sample of women seeking shelter. According to the New Brunswick Transition Houses 2005-2006 Activities Report, over half of the women (58 percent) utilized the residential services in the three major urban areas of Saint John, Moncton and Fredericton. Of the 311 surveys we received from New Brunswick, 25 percent were from houses in these three urban areas.

A more detailed look at the age distribution of the women in the survey indicates that only a small percentage of our sample were under 21 or over 60 years of age: nearly seven percent (6.9) were 20 years or younger while just over one percent (1.3) were between 61-75 years of age. Nearly fourteen percent (13.9) were between ages 21 - 25 and nearly twelve percent (11.8) percent were between 26-30 years old. Nearly seventeen percent (16.5) were between the ages of 31 - 35 and another seventeen percent (16.9) were between ages 36 - 40. Thirteen percent (13.3) of the women were ages 41 - 45. Less than nine percent (8.7) of the women were between ages 46 and 50. Another ten percent (10.4) were between the ages of 51 – 60. Since the numbers in each age group is relatively small we have not broken down this data by province. However, it is still interesting to note that the distribution of ages in our survey is very similar to that reported by the New Brunswick Transition Houses (New Brunswick Family and Community Services, 2006). They found that 66 percent of the women who utilized their services were 40 years old and under.

### **Presence of Children**

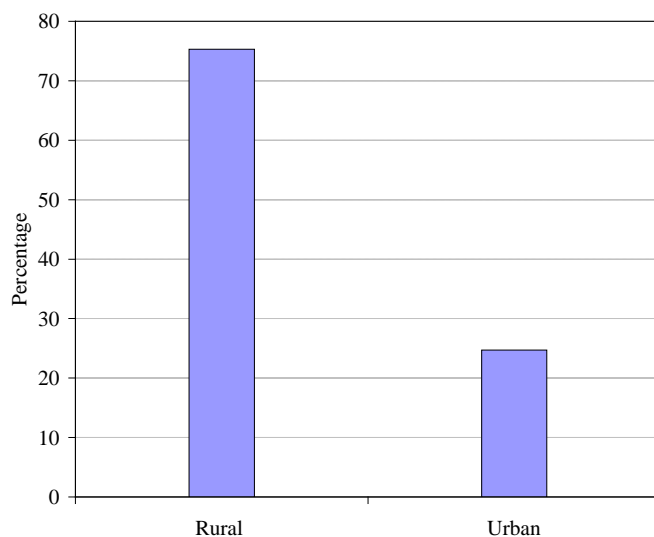
The survey asked for the ages and number of children accompanying their mother. Just over half of the women, 54 percent, had children accompanying them. For the purposes of this report we have referred to these women, as women with children. However, it is likely that some of the older women also had children but since they had not accompanied their mother, would not be captured in these data as women with children. Forty-one percent of the women with children had one child; thirty-one percent had two children. Nineteen percent had three children and nine percent of the women had four children or more who accompanied them. Over two-thirds of the children were under the age of ten. Of the 301 children, 40 percent were five years of age or younger and another 29 percent were between the ages of six and ten years. Nineteen percent of the children in our sample were between eleven and fifteen years old. This distribution of ages of residential children is similar to that reported by the New Brunswick Transition House report except that they reported a larger percentage of children who were five years and younger (53%) and fewer (3 percent) who were 16 years and older. Twelve percent of the children in our sample were sixteen or older.



## Rural-Urban Division

Researchers who have studied family violence in rural areas have argued that rural communities, while not identical in their social structure and values, do share important cultural, social and physical characteristics that are different from urban communities (Hornosty & Doherty 2004; 2003; Jiwani 1998; Biesenthal & Sproule, 2000; Websdale 1998). An important focus of the current research was to better understand the link between firearms and family violence in rural communities. An important variable therefore was the community of residence of the women in the survey data. As Graph 2 below indicates, a significant majority of women came from rural communities.

**Graph 2: Percentage by Rural –Urban Division**



Those completing the survey were asked to provide information on the community from which the women came. The set categories were rural, urban, out of province, native on reserve and native off reserve. In addition they were asked to name the community. When we reviewed the responses we noticed discrepancies in the way people categorized specific communities. Therefore, we decided to re-code the information for community of residence in a consistent way into rural and urban. For 14 of the cases this was not possible, usually because they were out of province. Of the remaining 377 cases, 75 percent of the women lived in rural communities, that is in communities 10,000 or under (as defined by National Resources Canada, 2004) while 25 percent lived in urban areas. Of

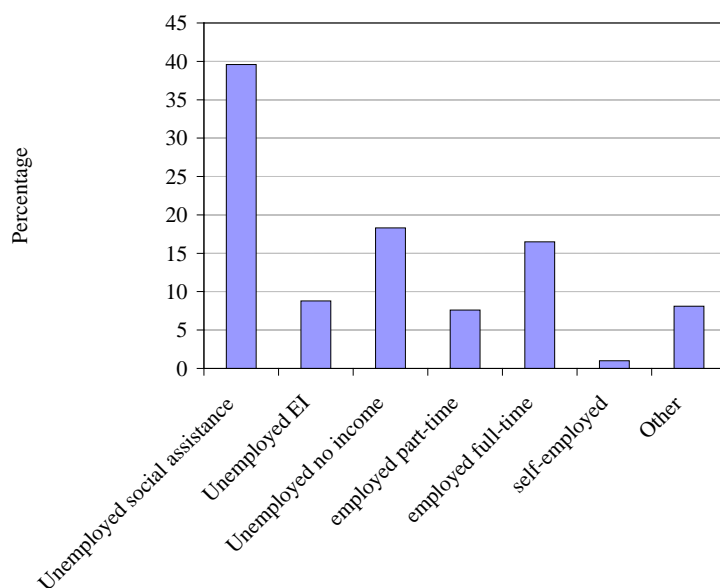
the total, Aboriginal women made up approximately 4.7 percent (some of whom lived in rural communities and others in urban areas). Nearly three percent of the women in our survey who sought transition house or crisis services were from out of province.

### Employment Status

Rural communities are often characterized by high unemployment and lack of financial resources is often a significant barrier for women who are trying to leave abusive relationships. The majority of the women in our survey, 69 percent, were unemployed; only 17 percent had full time employment. Of the total unemployed, nearly 60 percent were on social assistance. Graph 3 shows the percentages of the various employment categories. Of the total number of women in the sample, 40 percent were unemployed and on social assistance and 18 percent had no income. Only one-quarter of the women had employment. Given that the unemployment rate in the region is 10.0 for Prince Edward Island and 7.8 for New Brunswick (Statistics Canada, May 2007 Labour Force Survey), women in abusive relationship are clearly overrepresented among the unemployed.

An examination of employment status by rural and urban categories shows that there is little difference in the unemployment rates between those living in rural and urban areas. See the breakdown for employment status in Table 1.

**Graph 3: Employment Status**



The fact that there are limited employment opportunities in many rural communities further adds to the obstacles faced by abused women in rural areas.

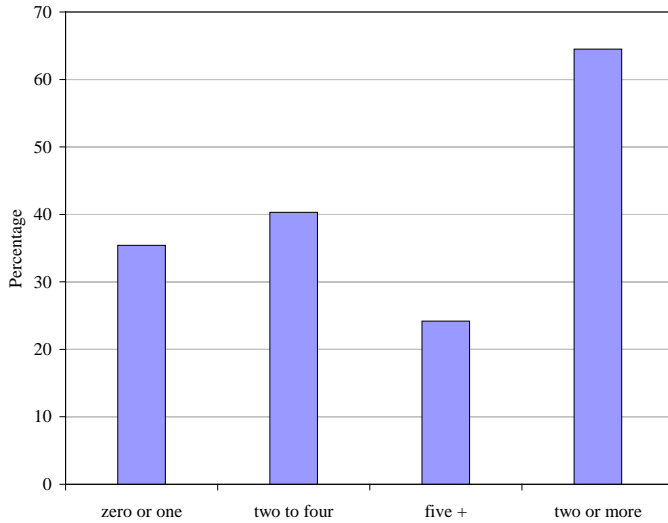
**Table 1: Comparison of Employment Status by Rural – Urban in Percent**

	<b>RURAL</b>	<b>URBAN</b>	<b>TOTAL (N)</b>
<b>Unemployed Social Assistance</b>	<b>37.7</b>	<b>43.0</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>Unemployed EI</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>No income</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Employed Part-time</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Employed Full-time</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>15.1</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Self-employed</b>	<b>.7</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>TOTAL (N)</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>370</b>

### **Separations from Current Partner**

Much of the research on family violence indicates that women leave their partners on a number of occasions before they leave the abusive relationship permanently (Landenberger, 1998). Women in our survey were asked about the number of times they had separated from their current partner. Of the 347 who answered this question, 40 percent (140 women) indicated that they had separated from their partner between two to four times and nearly one-quarter (84 women) indicated that they had left their partner on five or more occasions. Thirty –five percent (123 women) had either one or no separations from their partner. In other words, 64.5 percent of the women had two or more separations. See Graph 4.

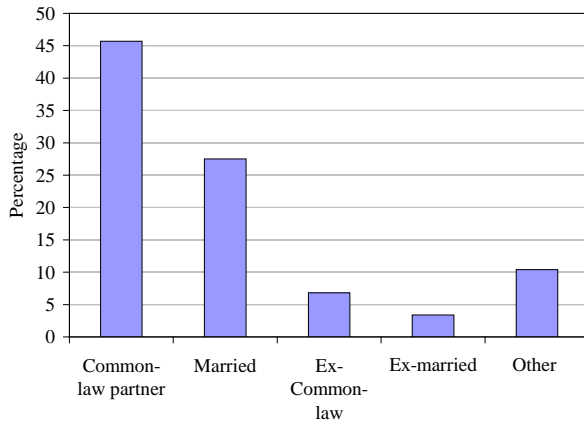
**Graph 4: Number of Separations from Current Partner by Percentage**



**Marital Status**

An examination of the marital status of our sample of abused women shows that the majority were seeking the transition house or crisis services because of abuse by a current common-law partner or ex-common law partner. Forty-six percent of the women in our study indicated that they were seeking help because of abuse by a current common-law partner and another seven percent they were being abused by an ex-common-law partner. This compared to 28 percent of currently married women who said that they were being abused by their partner. See Graph 5.

**Graph 5: Relationship to the Abuser**



“Other” types of abuse experienced by the women were from children, parents, current and ex-boyfriend and abuse by other relatives. Just less than two percent indicated that they were seeking crisis or transition house services because of fire, eviction, or the need to relocate. The information provided by New Brunswick Transition Houses indicates that 84 percent were at a transition house because of abuse by a current or ex-partner. They do not break down their data by common-law and married status. This is identical to what we found in our survey (although our data is for New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island combined).

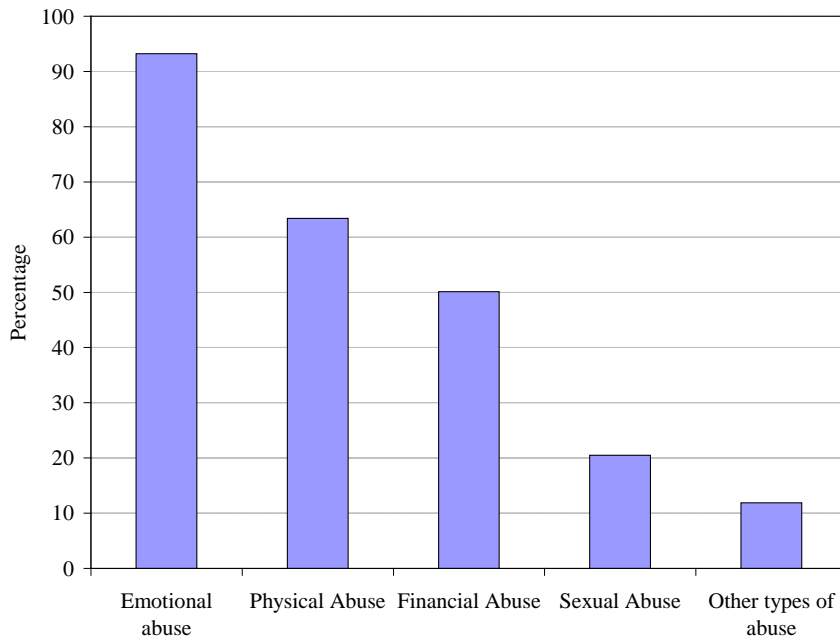
### **Types of Abuse Experienced**

Women were asked to indicate the types of abuse they had experienced in their current relationship as well as whether they had experienced or witnessed abuse previously. A very large percentage of all women who responded to the question indicated that they had experienced multiple kinds of abuse. Of the 370 women for whom we have complete data for this question, eighty percent (297 women) said that they had experienced two or more types of abuse<sup>6</sup>. Nearly all of the women, 93 percent, said that they had suffered emotional abuse, and just under two-thirds (63.4 percent) said that they had been physically abused. Half (50.1 percent) said they had experienced financial abuse. Just over twenty percent (20.5) of the women indicated that they had been sexually abused. Nearly twelve percent (11.9) reported experiencing other types of abuse. Examples mentioned of other types of abuse were: spiritual, isolation, verbal, stalking, animal abuse. See Graph 6 for the distribution.

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<sup>6</sup> When the frequencies were run on the different types of abuse experienced there were different numbers missing from the data. So for example, we have data on 380 women with respect to the question on emotional abuse, but 353 responses pertaining to other types of abuse.

**Graph 6: Types of Abuse Experienced**



In addition, forty-five percent of the women indicated that they had suffered abuse in a previous relationship. As well, nearly half, 48 percent, had been abused as children and just about the same number, 49 percent, indicated that they had witnessed abuse as a child.

Our data for types of abuse are similar to that reported by New Brunswick Transition Houses. This report shows that 84 percent of women who used their residential services had experienced emotional abuse and 53 percent were abused physically. Forty percent had experienced violence in previous adult relationships; 46 percent had been abused as children and 39 percent reported witnessing violence in the home as children.

### **Admissions to a Shelter**

Eighty-eight percent of the women had on at least one occasion used the residential facilities of a transition house, whereas twelve percent were day clients or out-reach clients. Half of the women had been admitted to a transition house on two or more occasions.

### **2.3 Comparison of the Two Data Sets**

There were two parts to the quantitative survey: Part A focused on demographic-type information including questions related to community of residence, employment status, age, number of children, types of abuse experience, frequency and reasons for seeking out transition house or crisis services discussed in more detail above. The questions in Part A were identical to the questions on the intake form used at transition houses for their recording purposes. Part B asked specific questions about the presence and types of firearms, the presence of pets and farm animals, the impact of firearms on decision-making, and whether there had been threats or harm to animals.

All women who entered transition houses or contacted Prince Edward Island Victim Services were to be provided with information about the research and asked whether they would be willing to participate. Those who agreed were asked to sign consent forms. Since the data in Part A was already collected by the intake workers, we asked them to record this data on our survey forms prior to asking the questions in Part B. We also requested the transition houses and victim services to complete Part A of our form even in cases where the women did not consent to participate, and return the surveys to us<sup>7</sup>. Since we received surveys with both parts answered in just over two-thirds of the cases, we were interested in comparing the two data sets or sub-groups to determine whether there were any significant differences between them. That is, can we reasonably assume that our findings in Part B can be generalized to the entire population in our survey?

Of the 391 surveys returned to us, 283 (72 percent) had both parts A and B completed, and 108 (28 percent) had completed just Part A. See Table 2 for these responses broken down by province. Of the total surveys received, 20.5 percent were from Prince Edward Island. Sixty-five percent of these had data for both Part A & B. In comparison, 74 percent of the surveys from New Brunswick had Part A & B completed. This table shows that Prince Edward Island, which accounts for 26 percent of surveys for which we have only Part A data, is somewhat overrepresented in the Part A data set in relation to total submissions.

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<sup>7</sup> While this occurred in some cases, we know by the number of surveys that were returned that there were many cases where, for whatever reason, transition houses and victim services, did not complete and return Part A of our survey.

**Table 2: Survey Submissions by Province**

	<b>PART A ONLY</b>	<b>PART A &amp; B</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>New Brunswick</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>311</b>
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>80</b>
	<b>108</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>391</b>

A total of 101 of surveys or 26 percent were received from Francophone transition houses. However, since Francophone houses only exist in New Brunswick, a more accurate reflection of francophone participation is to compare only the responses from New Brunswick. In doing so, we find that the participation rate of Francophone transition houses is 33 percent. This is identical to the proportion of French speaking residents in the province as of 2001 since 236,665 people, or 33%, of New Brunswick residents are Francophone (Statistics Canada, Population by mother tongue, by province and territory, 2001 Census). A further breakdown by whether or not both parts of the survey were completed suggests that women who sought the services of transition houses in Francophone regions were more likely to complete the survey: 79 percent of women in Francophone houses completed both parts, compared to 21 percent who completed just Part A. Of the 290 participants using the services of English speaking transition houses (in both provinces) and Victim Services, 70 percent completed both parts of the survey.

Table 3 presents information on employment status comparing individuals for whom we received only Part A - demographic information - with those who completed both parts of the survey. In thirty-nine of the cases, the question on employment status was either not answered or other sources of income were listed.

**Table 3: Employment Status and Completion of Survey**

	<b>PART A ONLY</b>	<b>PART A &amp; B</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>256</b>
<b>Employed</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>96</b>
	<b>90</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>352</b>



As we can see from the above table, those who were employed were somewhat more willing to participate in our study<sup>8</sup>. Of those who were employed, 79 percent completed both parts of the survey, whereas 73 percent of the unemployed agreed to participate and completed the survey.

Another variable where we compared the two data sets to see if there were major differences is in community of residence. The question asked whether the women lived in a rural community, an urban community, were out of province or were Native (either on Reserve or off Reserve). Two hundred and eighty-four individuals were categorized as living in rural areas and 93 were deemed to be living in urban areas. Fourteen cases were missing from this categorization. Table 4 looks at survey completion by community of residence. We see that we have a higher proportion of complete data on women’s experiences in rural communities than we have for women in urban areas. Of all women in our survey, 75 percent lived in rural areas. Seventy-four percent of women living in rural areas completed both parts of the survey; sixty-six percent of women from urban communities completed both parts.

**Table 4: Community of Residence and Completion of Survey**

	<b>PART A ONLY</b>	<b>PART A &amp; B</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Rural</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>284</b>
<b>Urban</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>93</b>
	<b>106</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>377</b>

Again, we notice some difference between the two sub-groups; although, given the relatively low numbers in the sample, one cannot conclude whether the differences are statistically significant.

Four other variables between the two sub-groups were explored for possible differences: relationship to the abuser, types of abuse experienced, whether or not there were children, and number of admissions to a shelter. In both sub-groups, over 40 percent of the women had been abused as a child, had witnessed abuse, and had experienced abuse in a previous relationship. Also, in both groups, a large majority of the women, over 70 percent, had experienced two or more types of abuse. See Table 5 for a comparison.

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<sup>8</sup> The assumption here is that there was no selection bias in terms of who was asked to participate in the study. As we have discussed, all women entering transitions houses or seeking the assistance of victim services were to be asked whether they would be willing to participate.

**Table 5: Percentage Experiencing Different Types Abuse by each Sub-Group**

	<b>PART A ONLY</b>	<b>PART A &amp; B</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Experienced Abuse as a Child</b>	<b>47 %</b>	<b>49 %</b>	<b>48 %</b>
<b>Witnessed Abuse as a Child</b>	<b>43 %</b>	<b>51 %</b>	<b>49 %</b>
<b>Experienced Abuse in a Previous Relationship</b>	<b>42 %</b>	<b>46 %</b>	<b>45 %</b>
<b>Experienced Two or More Types of Abuse</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>82 %</b>	<b>80 %</b>
<b>Experienced Physical Abuse</b>	<b>51 %</b>	<b>68 %</b>	<b>63 %</b>

The data above show, perhaps not surprisingly, that women who participated by completing the survey (that is, completed Part A and B) were somewhat more likely to have witnessed abuse as a child, to have experienced two or more types of abuse and more likely to have been abused physically, emotionally and sexually. Eighty-nine percent of those for whom we only have demographic data were emotionally abused and ten percent were sexually abused. By comparison, 95 percent of those who participated in the survey indicated that they had been emotionally abused and 25 percent indicated that they had been sexually abuse.

As we saw in the previous section, the majority of women, 53 percent, who were seeking transition house or crisis services were being abused by a common-law or ex-common law partner. Table 6 below looks at the relationship of the abuser for the two data sets. We see that a somewhat higher percentage of women being abused by a common-law partner participated by completing the survey. In total, 176 women said that they were being abused by a common-law partner. Of the 278 surveys with Part A and B complete, nearly one-half of the women indicated that they were seeking services because of abuse by a common-law partner; in those cases where we have only demographic data, 36 percent indicated they were being abused by a common-law partner.

**Table 6: Relationship to the Abuser for Both Data-sets by Percent**

	<b>PART A</b>	<b>PART A &amp; B</b>	<b>TOTAL (N)</b>
<b>Common-law partner</b>	<b>35.5</b>	<b>49.6</b>	<b>176</b>
<b>Ex-common-law partner</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Married</b>	<b>27.1</b>	<b>27.7</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Ex-married Partner</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Total who answered question(N)</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>384</b>

Table 7 compares the two sub-groups according to the number of admissions to a transition house. In both groups, approximately one half of the women had sought the services of a shelter on at least two occasions. The data show that in ten percent of all cases women had been to a transition house five or more times; however, more than one-eighth of those for whom we have only demographic data had used the services of a transition house on five or more occasions.

**Table 7: Admissions to Transition House by Sub-Group by Number and Percent**

	<b>PART A ONLY</b>	<b>PART A &amp; B</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Two or more admissions</b>	<b>46 (47%)</b>	<b>122 (51%)</b>	<b>168 (48%)</b>
<b>Five or more admissions</b>	<b>14 (14%)</b>	<b>22 (9%)</b>	<b>36 (10%)</b>
<b>Total who completed question on admissions</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>337</b>

The final variables we compared for the two groups were the ages of the women and the number of children accompanying their mother. In both cases, we found that there were some slight differences. Forty-seven percent of those women for whom we have only demographic (Part A) information had children, of whom 56 percent were five years old or younger, whereas 57 percent of those who completed the survey had children. Of

these, 59 percent had one or more child aged 5 years or younger. Table 8 shows the age categories for women in both sub-groups. Whereas nearly two percent of women who participated in our survey were 61 years or older, none of the women for women we have only demographic data fell into this age category.

**Table 8: Ages of Women by Sub-group**

	<b>PART A</b>	<b>PART A &amp; B</b>
<b>16 - 30 years old</b>	<b>34.3</b>	<b>32.0</b>
<b>31 – 45 years old</b>	<b>44.4</b>	<b>47.7</b>
<b>46 – 60 years old</b>	<b>21.3</b>	<b>18.5</b>

In comparing the two data sets on a number of variables, we see that there is generally very little difference in the demographic characteristics of women in the two sub-groups. Furthermore, we saw in the first section of the discussion of quantitative data that the demographic characteristics of all the women in our quantitative sample were similar to those women who utilized the residential services of New Brunswick transition houses. This suggests that we can somewhat safely generalize our findings concerning firearms and pet abuse discussed in detail below to abused women, particularly in rural communities.

## **2.4 Profile of Survey Participants**

This section of the discussion will focus only on those 283 women who completed Part B of the survey. We refer to them as survey participants because they signed consent forms indicating a willingness to be part of our study. This group of women is of special interest because their answers provide relevant data pertaining to firearms ownership, concern for safety and pet ownership. Looking at this group separately from those for whom we have only demographic information provides a clearer understanding of the main objective of this study, namely to examine for a broad regional perspective, the various dimensions or forms in which firearms may and do serve as instruments of control, intimidation and abuse in domestic situations.

## Demographic data

Of the 283 surveys received, 82 percent (231) were from New Brunswick and 18 percent (52) were from Prince Edward Island. See table 9.

**Table 9: Percentage and Frequency by Province**

	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
<b>New Brunswick</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>81.6</b>
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>18.4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>283</b>	

Of the total, approximately seven percent either indicated that they were Aboriginal (either on reserve or off reserve) or used the services of a transition house for Aboriginal women<sup>9</sup>. Our response rate from Aboriginal women is consistent with that reported to the New Brunswick Department of Family and Community Services. Information obtained from the New Brunswick Transition Houses 2005-2006 Activities Report (New Brunswick Family and Community Services, 2006) indicates that seven percent of their clients were First Nations women and children.

Approximately 35 percent of the 231 women in our survey from New Brunswick were Francophone. This was calculated using the number of responses from the French-speaking transition houses in the province which is comparable to the 33% of Francophones in the population. (Statistics Canada, Population by mother tongue, by province and territory, 2001 Census). By comparison, information provided by the New Brunswick Transition Houses report shows that 21 percent of their clients used the services of the Francophone houses.

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<sup>9</sup> A number of those who checked Aboriginal Status were subsequently reclassified as living in rural or urban areas. To calculate the number of those of Aboriginal Status, we counted all those who either checked this status (on-reserve or off-reserve) or who utilized the services of Gignoo House, a transition house in New Brunswick that provides services almost exclusively for Aboriginal women.

## Rural-Urban Division

The majority of women in our survey, both from New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, were from rural areas. Information on the community of residence indicated whether the women lived in a rural or urban community, were from out of province or were Native (on or off reserve). In most cases, the actual name of the community where the women resided was also provided. After looking closely both at the self-identification of community type and the actual name of the community, and for consistency purposes, we made a decision for consistency purposes to re-code the residence data of rural and small town as being populations of 10,000 or less (Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1851-2001, 2001).

As Table 10 illustrates, 78 percent of all respondents (on the basis of the recoded data) lived in rural areas. Virtually all of the women from Prince Edward Island resided in rural communities. This is hardly surprising since much of the province is rural. In New Brunswick, nearly three-quarters of the women (73 percent) resided in rural communities. While a large part of New Brunswick is also rural, (50% as of 2001) (Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1851-2001, 2001), the high percentage of women in our survey in both provinces suggests that a disproportionate number of abused women who sought transition house or crisis services come from rural communities. This would suggest that family violence is more pervasive in rural communities than in urban ones. Thirty-one percent of women in our survey utilized the residential services in the three major urban areas of Moncton, Saint John and Fredericton, somewhat less than that reported by the New Brunswick Transition Houses (58 percent). However, as their report notes, this does not mean the women came from these cities, but rather that is where they sought services.

**Table 10: Community Type and Province in Percentage and Frequency**

	<b>PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND</b>	<b>NEW BRUNSWICK</b>	<b>TOTAL (N)</b>
<b>Rural</b>	<b>51 (98%)</b>	<b>159 (73%)</b>	<b>210 (78%)</b>
<b>Urban</b>	<b>1 (2%)</b>	<b>60 (27%)</b>	<b>61 (22%)</b>
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>271</b>

### Age of the Women and Presence of Children

The women who completed our survey ranged in ages from 16 – 75. As Table 11 shows, nearly half of the women were between 31 to 45 years of age; another 32 percent were between the ages of 16 and 30. A larger percentage of women in New Brunswick were 30 years old or under.

**Table 11: Ages of Women by Province in Percent and Frequency**

	<b>PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND</b>	<b>NEW BRUNSWICK</b>	<b>TOTAL (N)</b>
<b>16 – 30 years</b>	<b>21.2 % (11)</b>	<b>34.5 % (79)</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>31 – 45 years</b>	<b>61.5 % (32)</b>	<b>44.5 % (102)</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>46 – 60 years</b>	<b>13.5 % ( 7)</b>	<b>19.7 % ( 45)</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>61 + years</b>	<b>3.8 % (2)</b>	<b>1.3 % (3)</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>281</b>

Fifty-seven percent of the women in the survey reported having one or more children. There was a difference here between the provinces. Eighty-five percent of women from Prince Edward Island had children accompanying them, whereas 51 percent of women from New Brunswick had at least one child accompanying them. As explained previously the information from the survey concerning children pertains only to those children who were accompanying their mother, so it possible that other women had children, which is not reflected in our data. Of all women with children, 59 percent had at least one child who was five years old or younger; 41 percent had children between the ages of six and ten years old; 24 percent had children between the ages of eleven and fifteen; and 18 percent had one or more children sixteen years or older. Clearly a number of the women had children in more than one age category. A comparison by province shows that slightly more women from New Brunswick had children five years or younger, 61 percent compared to 52 percent for women in Prince Edward Island. In Prince Edward Island, 32 percent of women had children sixteen years or older accompanying them, compared to thirteen percent of the women in New Brunswick.

## Employment Status

A very large percentage of the women, 71 percent, were unemployed. Abused women are clearly overrepresented among the unemployed given that the unemployment rates in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island respectfully are 7.8 percent and 10.0 percent (Statistics Canada, May 2007 Labour Force Survey). Table 12 below provides information on the employment status of respondents both from New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. The difference in the employment status of women in the two provinces is significant. Whereas three-quarters of the women from New Brunswick were unemployed, slightly less than half of the women from Prince Edward Island were in that situation. The reasons for this difference are not clear. All, but one of the women from Prince Edward, were identified as living in rural communities, and the unemployment rates are generally higher in rural areas.

**Table 12: Employment/Unemployment Status by Province by Number and Percentage**

	<b>NEW BRUNSWICK</b>	<b>PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>163 (76%)</b>	<b>23 (48%)</b>	<b>186 (71%)</b>
<b>Employed</b>	<b>51 (24%)</b>	<b>25 (52%)</b>	<b>76 (29%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>262</b>

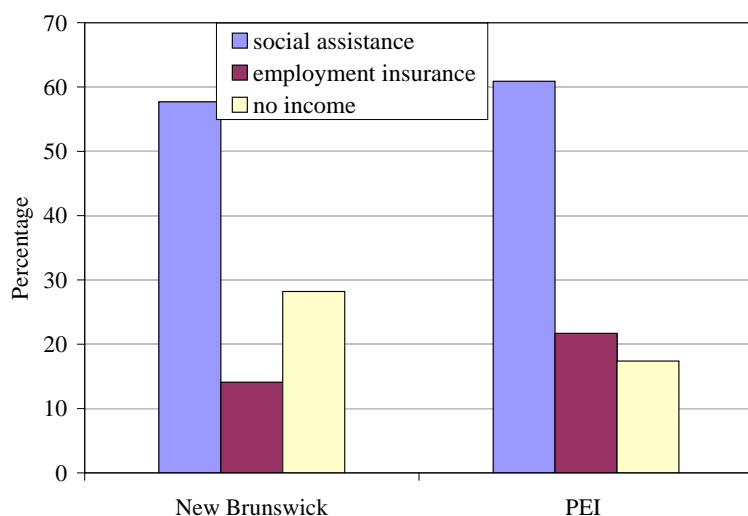
Of those in Prince Edward Island who indicated that they were employed, 80 percent were employed full-time. In New Brunswick, by contrast, only 63 percent of the employed women were employed full-time. Seven percent of the respondents checked the category “other” regarding their financial status. Of these, just under half indicated that they were receiving disability insurance or a pension. Other sources of income mentioned were support payments, accident insurance and education support.

Of the 186 women who were unemployed, the majority (58 percent or 108 women) were on social assistance. Fifteen percent (28 women) indicated that they were receiving employment insurance. The other twenty-seven percent (50 women) indicated that they had no source of income. A breakdown by province shows that of the 231 women from



New Brunswick, 70.6 percent were unemployed. Of these, nearly 58 percent were receiving social assistance, 14 percent were collecting employment insurance, and 28 percent had no source of income. In Prince Edward Island 44 percent of the 52 women were unemployed. Nearly 61 percent of these women were receiving social assistance; 21.7 percent were getting employment insurance and 17.4 percent had no income at all. See Graph 7.

**Graph 7: Sources of Income for those Unemployed by Province**



Lack of financial resources creates a significant barrier for abused rural women. Frequently combined with low education and limited job opportunities, rural women can easily feel trapped in the abusive relationship.

### **Types of Abuse**

Women were asked a number of questions about the abuse they experienced. Of the 273 women who answered the questions pertaining to types of abuse, 82 percent indicated that they had experienced two or more types of abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, financial or other). Nearly all of the women, 95 percent, had experienced emotional abuse. Over two-thirds had experienced physical abuse. See Table 13.

**Table 13: Percentage of/and Types of Abuse Experienced**

<b>TYPES OF ABUSE</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE EXPERIENCED</b>
<b>Emotional</b>	<b>95 %</b>
<b>Physical</b>	<b>68 %</b>
<b>Financial</b>	<b>57 %</b>
<b>Sexual</b>	<b>25 %</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>9 %</b>
<b>Experienced two or more types</b>	<b>82 %</b>

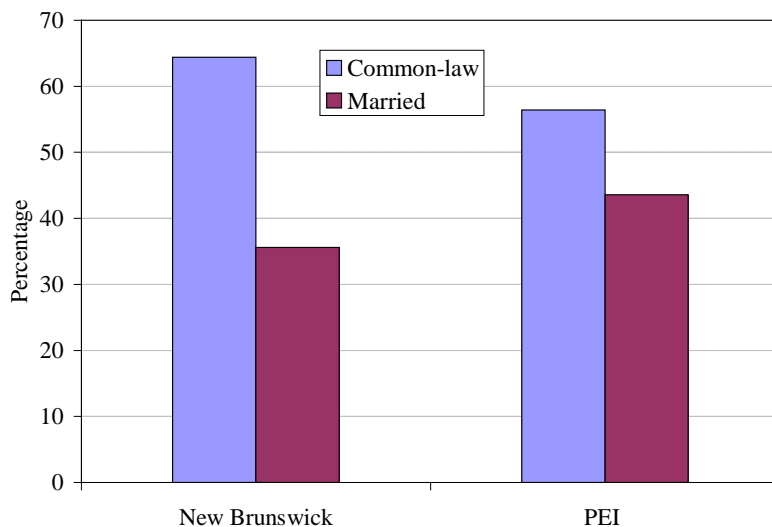
Types of abuse mentioned under “other” included: verbal abuse, spiritual abuse, animal abuse, damage to property, control, isolation and stalking. A comparison of the types of abuse by urban–rural categories shows little difference. Eighty–two percent of women in rural communities experienced two or more types of abuse compared with 83 percent in urban areas. The same percentage of women in both areas experienced physical abuse; 94 percent of the women in rural areas and 97 percent in urban areas experienced emotional abuse. Twenty-four percent of rural women were sexually abused compared to 27 percent of the women from urban areas.

Besides the abuse in their current relationship, nearly half of the women, 46 percent, had been in a previous abusive relationship. Forty-nine percent had been abused when they were children, and 51 percent had witnessed abuse as a child. Such a history of abuse is consistent with other research which shows that abused women are often trapped in a cycle of abuse (Landenberger, 1998). Abused as children or witnessing abuse, girls from abusive homes frequently end up in abusive relationships later in life (Cicchetti & Toth, 1995). As we found in previous interviews with abused rural women, abuse can be normalized when it is a regular occurrence in family life. Women told us that it took some time before they ‘named’ certain behaviours as abuse because they assumed these behaviours were just a normal part of life (Doherty & Hornosty 2004; Hornosty & Doherty 2003; Hornosty, Doherty & McCallum 1997).

## Relationship to Abuser

When asked for the reasons they were going to the transition house or seeking help from other crisis services, the majority of women (77 percent) in our survey indicated that they were being abused by their partner, either married or common-law. Another nine percent were seeking these services because of abuse from an ex-partner, married or common-law. In New Brunswick, 64 percent of those being abused in a current relationship were abused by a common-law partner; in Prince Edward Island, the percentage was 56 percent. As Graph 8 below shows, over half of the women in both provinces seeking assistance were being abused by common-law partners. Thirty-seven of the women in both provinces were abused by their husbands; of these 44 percent were from Prince Edward Island and 36 percent were from New Brunswick

**Graph 8: Abuse Experienced in Marital and Common-law Relationships by Province**



Consistent with findings from other research, these data clearly show that women in common-law relationships are in greater danger of being abused than those who are married (Canadian Department of Justice, 2005). The latest figures for the percentage of common-law relationships in Canada show that 2,284,830 (or 7.6 percent) of Canadians are in common-law relationships, so we see that abused women are significantly over-represented in common-law relationships (Common-law Status, 2001 Census).

There is a slight difference in the relationship status of the abuser when the data are broken down according to rural and urban communities for current partners. Of all current

partners (married and common-law) husbands were more likely to be the abuser in rural areas, 38 percent compared to 35 percent for urban areas. For common-law relationships the reverse was true. Common-law partners were more likely to abuse in urban areas, 65 percent, compared to 62 percent in rural communities.

### **Admissions to a Shelter**

For the majority of women in our survey, this was not the first time that they had gone to a transition house. Forty-eight percent indicated that they had two or more admissions to a transition house. Nine percent of the women had used the services of a transition house on five or more occasions. A comparison by province shows that more women in New Brunswick (50 percent) had used the services of a transition house on two or more occasions than those in Prince Edward Island (37 percent). There was no difference between the provinces in terms of the percentage of women who went to a transition house five or more times.

### **Separations from Partner**

One-third (33.8 percent) of the 263 women who answered this question had separated from their partner for the first time. In nearly two-thirds of the cases, 66 percent, the women had separated from their partner on two or more occasions. One quarter of the women, 25.8 percent, had left their partner five times or more. There was no difference in this respect between women from the two provinces, except that a slightly larger percentage of women from Prince Edward Island, 28 percent compared to 25 percent in New Brunswick had left their partner on five or more occasions.

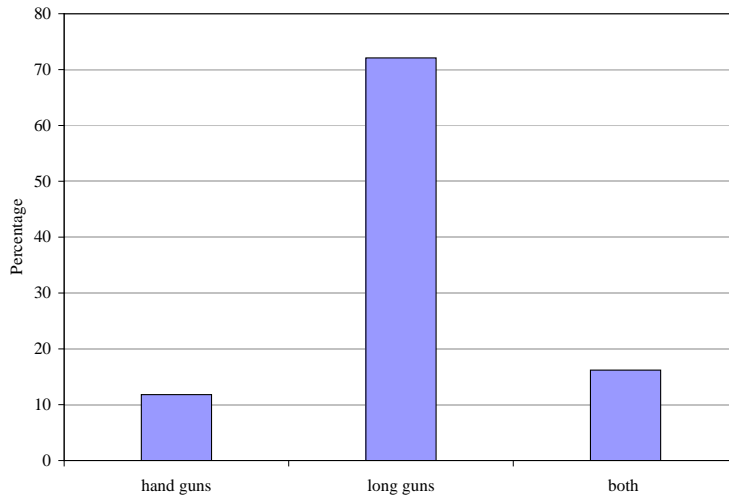
## **2.5 Presence of Firearms**

A major aim of this study was to better understand the extent to which abused women live with firearms and the impact this has on their well-being. Are firearms a significant part of rural culture in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island? Does their presence affect women's fear and concern for their safety and does it have an impact on their decision-making? Can firearms become a means of control, intimidation and abuse in family violence situations in rural areas? To address these issues we asked several specific questions in our survey pertaining to firearms. Ideally, we would have liked to have asked more questions; however, we had to limit the number of questions in order not to take up too much time of the transition house workers who were collecting this data on our behalf.

In our earlier research (Hornosty & Doherty 2003), we learned that firearms are a fact of life in rural New Brunswick. We were also told by service providers and abused rural women that the presence of firearms in homes increased women's fear and were often part of a cycle of intimidation in abusive relationships. A national study (Hung, 1999) found that 34 percent of Canadian women killed by their partners are shot and in a study of domestic homicides in New Brunswick, Doherty (2006) found that nearly 70 percent of these occurred in small towns and rural communities, and that 46 percent of the women were killed by firearms. The Ontario Rural Woman Abuse study (Biesenthal & Sproule 2000) found that many women they interviewed stated that their abusive partners had access to guns. They also noted women expressed concern for their children's safety when they visited their father because of unregistered firearms.

All women who completed the survey were asked, "In your current relationship, were there firearms in your household in the past 3 years?" If they answered "yes", they were asked more specific questions about the types and status of the firearms. One-quarter of the women who answered the question (n=276) indicated there were firearms in their household (n=68), the vast majority were long guns (72 percent); 16 percent indicated there were both long guns and handguns in their household. See Graph 9 below.

**Graph 9: Type of Firearm in Household by Percentage**



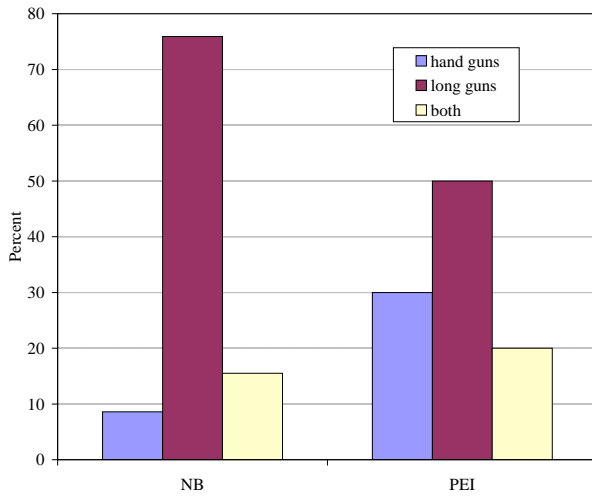
Of the sixty-seven households<sup>10</sup> with firearms where we also have information on rural and urban status, 86.6 percent were located in rural households. Hence it is not surprising that a large proportion of the firearms – in total 88.2 percent<sup>11</sup> - were long guns, which are more typically used for hunting or destroying rodents and other pests. If we look solely at rural households, we see that 75.4 percent indicated that the only firearms were long guns. 8.8 percent of rural households with firearms indicated these were handguns; 15.8 percent of the households in rural areas had both long guns and hand guns. Put another way, of the 49 households which indicated there were only long guns, 87.8 percent were in rural areas. Of the eleven households which had both long guns and hand guns, 82 percent were located in rural areas. Data from our survey suggests firearms are more likely to be present in rural homes than urban ones. Overall, 24.6 percent of our sample indicated there were firearms present in the household. However, of the 264 cases for which we data on both area of residence and firearm ownership, we see that twenty-eight percent of women from rural communities indicated that there were firearms in the home compared to fifteen percent who indicated this in urban areas.

There were some differences in the relative percentage of firearms ownership and type between New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island as indicated in Graph 10.

<sup>10</sup> In total, 68 women indicated that there were firearms in their household. However, when we cross-tabulated this data by urban/rural, we lost one case for a total cases of 67 for which we have information on both firearms and whether the community was rural or urban.

<sup>11</sup> This figure is arrived at by adding the number of indicated that there were only long guns in the household with those who indicated there were both long guns and hand guns.

**Graph 10: Types of Firearms by Province and Percentage**



Whereas 26 percent of the women in New Brunswick indicated that there were firearms in their household, only 17 percent of women in Prince Edward Island stated this was the case<sup>12</sup>. In Prince Edward Island, sole long guns ownership accounted for half (five of the ten responses) of the firearms ownership whereas in New Brunswick they constituted 76 percent (44 of the 58 response) of the firearms. A slightly larger percentage of women in Prince Edward Island, (20 percent (two women) compared to 16 percent (nine women) for New Brunswick) indicated that there were both long guns and hand guns in the home. Of the eight women who indicated that there were only hand guns in their household, three women (37.5 percent) were from Prince Edward Island and five women (62.5 percent) were from New Brunswick. When we combine the numbers who indicated that there were only long guns in the household with those who indicated there were both long guns and hand guns, we see that 70 percent of our sample in Prince Edward Island had long guns while 91.4 per cent in New Brunswick had long guns. While these differences are interesting, it must also be kept in mind that we are dealing with small numbers of firearms, especially in the case of Prince Edward Island where only nine of the 52 women who answered the question indicated that there were firearms in their household.

<sup>12</sup> The number for which we have information on both province and firearm ownership is 276. Of these, 52 were from Prince Edward Island and 224 were from New Brunswick. Of the 68 households with firearms, nine (13.2 percent) were from Prince Edward Island.

### Status of the Firearms

Those who indicated that there were firearms in their household were asked specifically whether the firearms were licensed, registered, kept locked, or kept loaded. Not all of the 68 women who indicated that there were firearms in their home answered each of the sub-questions. However, our findings from the survey clearly suggest that despite current legislation in Canada which requires that all firearms be registered and that they be stored, unloaded, in a secure fashion, there is a high degree of non-compliance amongst the population in our study.

Nearly 40 percent of our respondents indicated that the firearms were not licensed; 44 percent stated that the firearms were not registered; and half said that the firearms were not kept locked. For each of the specific questions, just over three percent indicated that some of the firearms were registered, licensed and kept locked while others were not. Eleven percent indicated that the firearms were kept loaded. Of special interest was the number of responses for each category who indicated they did not know the status of the firearms. See Table 14.

**Table 14: Status of Firearms by Percentage**

	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	<b>SOME ARE</b>	<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>
<b>Licensed</b>	<b>42.2</b>	<b>39.1</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>N=64</b>
<b>Registered</b>	<b>29.7</b>	<b>43.8</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>N=64</b>
<b>Kept Locked</b>	<b>35.9</b>	<b>50.0</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>N=64</b>
<b>Loaded</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>68.8</b>	<b>20.3</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>N=64</b>

A comparison of the status of the firearms by province indicates that firearms were less likely to be licensed, registered or kept locked in New Brunswick; however, given the small sample size in Prince Edward Island makes it difficult to know whether the differences are significant. We also found that firearms in rural areas were less likely to be licensed, registered or kept locked compared to those found in homes in urban areas. See Table 15. These percentages were calculated based on the total number who answered the



question rather than just those who knew with certainty the status of the firearms. Had we excluded those who indicated that they “did not know”, the percentage of “yes” responses in each category would be higher.

**Table 15: Percentage Who Answered “YES” by Rural – Urban**

	<b>RURAL</b>	<b>URBAN</b>
<b>Firearms NOT Licensed</b>	<b>41.8</b>	<b>25.0</b>
<b>Firearms NOT Registered</b>	<b>48.2</b>	<b>14.3</b>
<b>Firearms NOT Locked</b>	<b>51.8</b>	<b>28.6</b>
<b>Firearms Kept LOADED</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>0.0</b>

These findings on firearms registration and storage are a reflection of the extent to which firearms are a taken-for-granted part of rural life, and not something that requires special consideration. Based on the information we obtained from the qualitative part of our study, the survey data discussed above underestimates both the presence of firearms in rural communities and the degree to which firearms are not licensed, registered or properly stored.

### **Fear of Firearms**

The acceptance of firearms as part of rural culture may be normative; however in abusive homes there is reason for concern. Firearms can easily turn deadly and women may be more fearful for their safety and well-being as a result of the presence of firearms. To determine whether or not the presence of firearms heighten women’s fear and insecurity, we specifically asked women who lived with firearms: “Did knowing that there were firearms in your home make you more fearful for your safety and well-being?” Sixty-four women answer the question; of these, sixty-six percent indicated that the presence of firearms made them more fearful. Women in Prince Edward Island were more likely to answer “yes” that knowing firearms were in the home made them more fearful for their safety and well-being, but the sample, as indicated below in Table 16, is small.

**Table 16: Response to Question whether Firearms Made Women More Fearful by Province and Percentage**

	<b>NEW BRUNSWICK</b>	<b>PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>63.6 (n=35)</b>	<b>77.8 (n=7)</b>	<b>65.6 (n=42)</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>36.4 (n=20)</b>	<b>22.2 (n=2)</b>	<b>34.4 (n=22)</b>
<b>Total number of responses</b>	<b>N=55</b>	<b>N=9</b>	<b>N=64</b>

More of the women who lived in urban areas said that the presence of firearms in the home made them more fearful. Eighty-six percent said “yes” to the question compared to 63 percent from rural communities. This difference may not be significant because of the small number (seven) from urban areas who answered the question.

Women who responded that firearms did make them more fearful were then further asked: “Did it in any way affect your decision to tell others about your situation or seek help?” Seventy percent indicated that it did affect their decision. A higher percentage of women in Prince Edward Island, 86 percent, said that it affected their decision, compared to 67 percent of women in New Brunswick. Women who lived in rural communities were more likely to say that the presence of firearms affected their decision. Seventy percent of rural women said that it affected their decision compared to 60 percent of women from urban areas. However, as indicated above, the number of responses from urban areas was very small.

Unfortunately, we did not ask a further follow-up question about the ways in which their decision was affected. Based on our qualitative findings, it appears that some women’s fears were heightened in a way that made them more reluctant to seek help or tell someone. Also, some women indicated they were more reluctant to call the police for fear their partner would become angry if his firearms were confiscated. As well, participants in the qualitative part of our study suggested that sometimes women may be more reluctant to leave an abusive situation where firearms are present for fear that their partner would harm or kill a pet or farm animal.

## **Presence of Firearms and Children**

Of the 64 households where firearms were present and we have information about children, 57 percent had children. In 43 percent of these households the firearms were not registered<sup>13</sup> and in 33 percent (12 of the 36 households with children) the individual who owned the firearms did not have a license.<sup>14</sup> Nearly forty-three percent (42.9) of households with children, the firearms were not registered. In 42.9 percent of the cases the firearms were not kept locked and in 11.4 percent the firearms were kept loaded. If we look at the status of firearms in homes without children, we see the following: 46.4 percent (13 of the 28 households) did not have a license to own the firearms; in 44.8 percent the firearms were not registered; in 58.6 percent of the cases, the firearms were not kept locked and in 10.3 percent the firearms were kept loaded. In general, it appears there were some difference in the status and storage of firearms between homes with children (36 cases) and those without children (28 cases) although the actual numbers we are dealing with are small. Except for the fact that in homes with children a slightly larger percent indicated that firearms were kept loaded, those in homes without children were more likely to not have a license to own firearms and were less likely to have the firearms registered or kept in a locked location.

Simply looking at frequency concerning whether the presence of firearms in the household made women more fearful for their safety and well-being shows that 65.6 of the 64 women who answered the question indicated that they were more fearful. Although the actual number of cases for which we have the required information is small, we found that women with children were not more likely to be fearful than those without children. In fact, the reverse was true. Of the 36 women with children, 55.6 percent indicated that firearms made them more fearful whereas 75 percent (21 of the 28 women) of those without children said they were more fearful for their safety and well-being because of

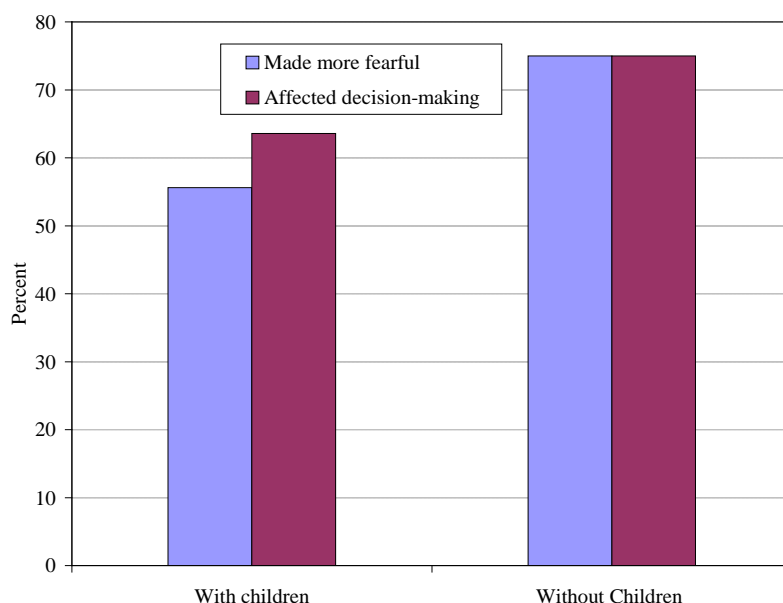
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<sup>13</sup> For each of the questions pertaining to the status of the firearms, women were asked to answer – yes/no/don't know/some are. Except where explicitly indicated the percentages reported are of the total. For example, 15 of the 35 (42.9 percent) who answered the question about firearms registration, indicated that the firearms were not registered. Seven individuals (20 percent) did not know whether the firearms were registered. If we just compared those who were certain about whether firearms were registered, that is, answered either 'yes' or 'no', we see that of these 27 cases, 55.5 percent indicated the firearms were not registered.

<sup>14</sup> While the question in the survey asked "were the firearms licensed?" the intent of the question was to determine whether the individual who had the firearms had a license to own these firearms.

firearms. Of the 46 women living in homes with firearms and who answered the question whether the presence of firearms affected their decision to tell others about their situation or seek help, 63.6 percent (14 of the 22) of women with children indicated it affected their decision whereas 75 percent (18 of the 24) of women without children said it affected their decision. ( See the comparison below in Graph 11.

**Graph 11: Fear of Firearms and Impact on Decision-making by Those with and Without Children and by Percentage**

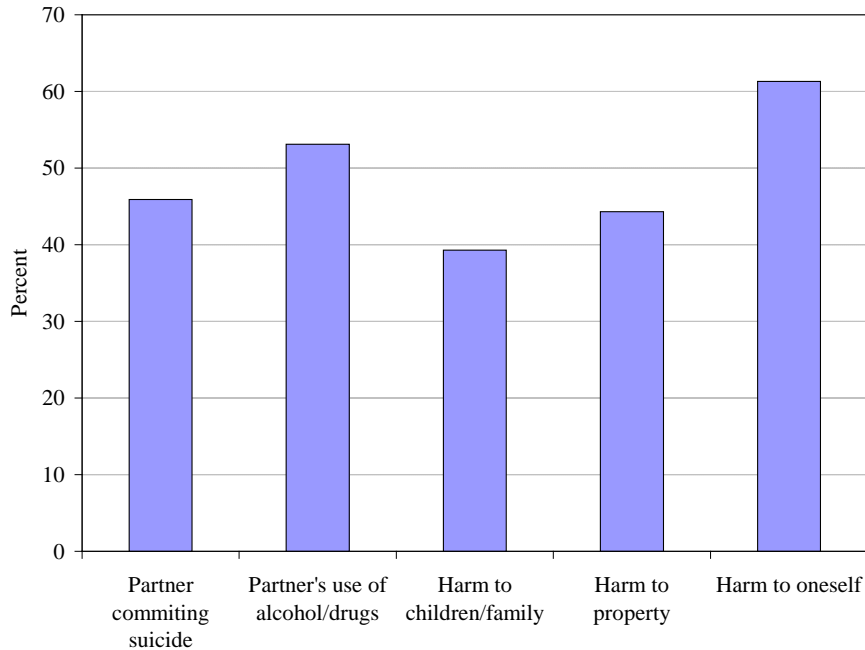


We are not able to explain from our survey why women with children in homes with firearms were, comparatively speaking, less fearful. However, the number of women in each category is small so one or two cases can affect the percentage quite drastically. What is significant, and what our survey data clearly show, is that over half of all abused women, with or without children, who lived in homes with firearms indicated that the presence of firearms made them more fearful for their safety. Judging by the information gathered in our qualitative research, a fear of firearms is not typical of the general population in rural communities. Our survey data suggest that in abusive homes, the availability of firearms can be a form of intimidation which exacerbates women’s fear and anxiety. The fact that in over sixty percent of the cases women indicated that the presence of firearms had an impact on their decision to tell others about the abuse or seek help is also significant.

## Reasons for Fear

In addition to questions about the impact on fear and decision-making, women were asked more specific questions about the reasons that firearms in the home made them more fearful. Graph 12 shows their responses. Sixty-one percent of the sixty-two women<sup>15</sup> who answered the question said that they were fearful that they would be harmed by firearms, whereas somewhat fewer (39 percent – of sixty-one women) expressed fear that their children or other family members could be harmed because of firearms in the home. Forty-six percent of 61 women answered ‘yes’ to the question whether they were concerned that their partner might commit suicide. Forty-four percent of the 61 women expressed concern that their partner might do harm to their property. Over half of the sixty-four women (53.1 percent) indicated that the presence of firearms made them fearful because of their partner’s use of alcohol or drugs. It is in such situations that firearms can easily become lethal.

**Graph 12: Reasons for Fear by Percentage**



<sup>15</sup> For each of the five statements women were asked to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the question “Did firearms in your home make you fearful about.... A different number of women answered each question. For example, 61 answered the question about fear that their partner might commit suicide and 64 answered the question concerning fear due to their partner’s use of alcohol or drugs. Eight of the women who answered the question answered ‘no’ to all five options, although seven of these had also indicated that knowing firearms were in the home did not make them more fearful for their safety. Seven of the women who answered the question said ‘yes’ to all five options.

There were some differences in responses to the question about why firearms made the women fearful when we compared those with children with those who did not have children. Overall, fifty-six percent of women with children<sup>16</sup> indicated that they were more fearful that firearms could be used to harm their children or other family members, whereas seventy-five percent without children indicated that they had concerns that there could be harm to family members. Just over half of both groups of women expressed fear about firearms because of their partner’s use of alcohol or drugs. See Table 17.

**Table 17: Reasons for Fear by Those with and Without Children by Percent Who Answered “Yes” in Each Category<sup>17</sup>**

	<b>WITH CHILDREN</b>	<b>WITHOUT CHILDREN</b>
<b>Partner committing suicide</b>	<b>42.4 (33)</b>	<b>50.0 (28)</b>
<b>Partner’s use of alcohol/drugs</b>	<b>51.4 (35)</b>	<b>55.2 (29)</b>
<b>Harm to children/family</b>	<b>48.6 (35)</b>	<b>26.9 (26)</b>
<b>Harm to property</b>	<b>34.3 (35)</b>	<b>57.7 (27)</b>
<b>Harm to oneself</b>	<b>51.4 (35)</b>	<b>74.1 (27)</b>

Fewer women with children were concerned about their partners committing suicide or damaging their property as a result of firearms being in the household than those without children. Just over half, 51 percent, of women with children indicated that they were concerned that firearms would be used to harm them compared to 74 percent of women without children who expressed this fear. We further explored whether the status of the firearms i.e., whether registered, licensed, locked or loaded had any affect on the percentage of women who indicated that firearms made them more fearful. Although only a small number of abused women lived in homes where they knew the firearms that were kept loaded (n=6), this state made women who were dealing with abuse very fearful. Eighty-three percent of women in homes where they knew the guns were kept loaded indicated that they were fearful for their safety and well-being. Similarly, 83 percent of

<sup>16</sup> Of the 64 women , 36 had children .

<sup>17</sup> A different number of women answered each question. The numbers in brackets refer to the total number in each category – that is with or without children – who responded to the question.

women who indicated that they did not know whether the guns were loaded or not (n=12 said they were more fearful for their safety. See Table 18 below.

**Table 18: Status of Firearms and Fear for Safety by Percent**

	<b>ANSWERED “YES”</b>	<b>DIDN’T KNOW</b>
<b>Not Licensed</b>	<b>75.0</b>	<b>50.0</b>
<b>Not Registered</b>	<b>74.1</b>	<b>57.1</b>
<b>Not Kept Locked</b>	<b>77.4</b>	<b>71.4</b>
<b>Kept Loaded</b>	<b>83.3</b>	<b>83.3</b>

The table above illustrates that the status of firearms has a significant affect on women’s degree of fear and sense of well-being. In all situations, over three-quarters of the women who lived in homes where the firearms were not registered and not properly stored and secured were more like to say that they were fearful for their safety and well-being. As we saw earlier (Table 16), in 66 percent of the cases the presence of firearms in an abusive household made women generally more fearful, but it is evident that the improper storage of such firearms further intensifies women’s fear and concern for their safety. Also in situations where women did not know the status of the firearms, half or more said that they were more fearful because of firearms in their homes.

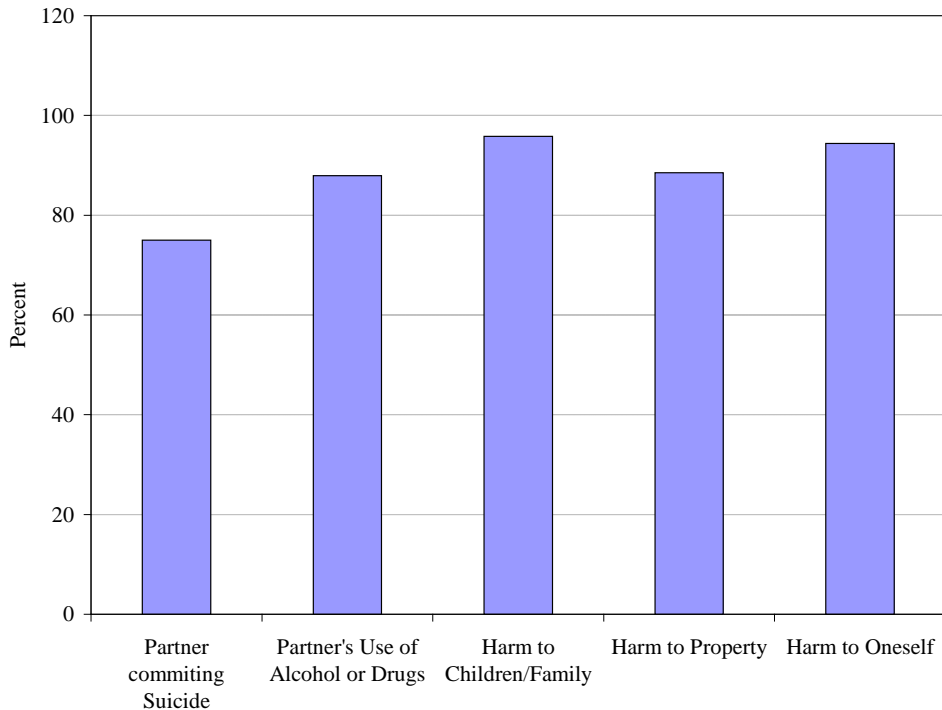
In Table 19 we explore whether the status of firearms affected women’s decision to tell others about their situation or seek help. In all cases, we see that women’s decisions to tell others about their situation or to seek help was significantly influenced by their knowledge that the firearms were not licensed, registered or properly stored. In over 80 percent of households where the women knew that the firearms were kept loaded, women indicated that it affected their decision. Similarly in three-quarters of the cases where women knew that the firearms were not kept locked, they said that it affected their decision to tell others about their situation.

**Table 19: Status of Firearms and Decision to Tell others or Seek Help by Percent**

	<b>ANSWERED “YES”</b>	<b>DIDN’T KNOW</b>
<b>Not Licensed</b>	<b>70.0</b>	<b>83.3</b>
<b>Not Registered</b>	<b>63.6</b>	<b>80.0</b>
<b>Not Kept Locked</b>	<b>75.9</b>	<b>25.0</b>
<b>Kept Loaded</b>	<b>83.3</b>	<b>90.9</b>

A final factor we looked at was the relationship between those women who indicated firearms in the home made them more fearful and their responses to the reasons that firearms made them more fearful. Sixty-eight women indicated that there were firearms in their home; however, only 64 women answered the question of whether firearms made them more fearful. Of those 65.6 percent indicated that ‘yes’ knowing firearms were in the home made them more fearful for their safety and well-being.

**Graph 13: Reasons for Concern where the Presence of Firearms made Women Fearful**





The graph above pertains only to those who answered in the affirmative that the presence of firearms in the home made them more fearful. As we can see, women who indicated that firearms in the home made them fearful were especially fearful of firearms in the home because of concern for harm to themselves (94.4 percent) or out of concern that their children or other family members might be harmed by firearms (95.8 percent)<sup>18</sup>. Eighty-eight percent indicated that they were more fearful of firearms because of their partner's use of drugs or alcohol and about the same number were concerned about their property being harmed. We see a similar relationship in all cases with women who indicated that firearms in the home affected their decision to tell others or seek help. Seventy-four percent who said they were concerned that their children or family members would be harmed indicated that it affected their decision of whether to seek help or not. Three-quarters of the women who said they were concerned about harm to themselves said that the presence of firearms affected their decisions. Seventy-seven percent of women who were fearful because of their partners' use of drugs or alcohol indicated that this had an affect on their decision on what to do about their situation.

In summary, the findings of our survey show that the presence of firearms in abusive homes can easily become instruments of intimidation and control. The majority of women indicated that it made them more fearful and had an affect on their decision to tell others about their circumstance. Women expressed greater concern for their own safety and that of their children as a result of firearms in the home. These fears were heightened when the firearms were not licensed or not stored property, a reality in a large percentage of the cases. Women in rural communities who are often geographically isolated may feel especially vulnerable. Threats of suicide or alcohol or drug abuse are likely to increase

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<sup>18</sup> Twenty-four women indicated that firearms made them fearful and answered the question on whether firearms made them fearful about harm to their children or other family members; of these 23 indicated they were fearful because of concern that their children or other family members might be harmed. Thirty-six women indicated that firearms made them fearful and answered the question on whether they were concerned about harm to themselves; of these 34 said they were concerned about harm to themselves. Twenty-eight women answered the question about whether firearms made them fearful and the question whether they were concerned about their partner committing suicide; of these 21 indicated in the affirmative. Thirty-three women answered the question about whether firearms made them fearful and the question of whether they were fearful because of their partner's use of alcohol and/or drugs; of these 29 indicated they were fearful for this reason. Twenty-six of the women answered the question about whether firearms made them more fearful and the questions about whether they had fear that there would be harm to property; of these 23 indicated they were fearful for this reason. In total, eight women answered 'no' to all five options and seven answered 'yes' to all five options concerning the reasons that firearms made them fearful.

during period of high stress or crisis such as illness and unemployment. However, when firearms are accepted as part of rural culture it is possible that their potential for misuse in abusive situations is minimized. Hence women may be reluctant to express their fears about the firearms, or if they do, they may not be taken seriously. This constellation of economic and social factors in rural areas, in combination with the rapid decline in services and programs, may set the stage for potentially lethal outcomes for abused rural women when firearms are present in the home.

## 2.6 Pets and Farm Animals

In our earlier research (Hornosty & Doherty, 2003), many of the rural and farm women we interviewed reported a cycle of intimidation that was characterized by threats of harm to family pets and farm animals. They told us in many cases that they delayed getting help or leaving their abusive relationship because of fear that their partner would harm the animals if they left. As a result of this, another objective in this study was to gather more information on the relationship between family violence, pet abuse and the role of firearms in these situations.

All women who completed the survey were asked whether within the past three years in their current relationship they had any pets or farm animals. Of the 273 women who answered the question concerning pets, seventy percent indicated they had at least one pet or farm animal in their household. Of these, 57 percent indicated that they also had children.

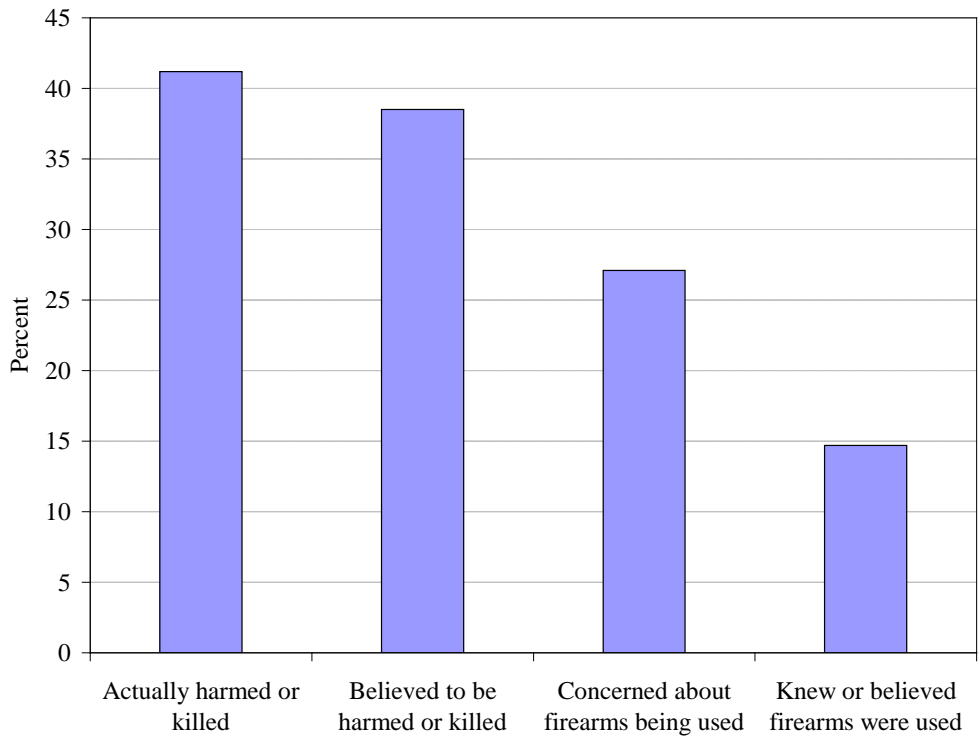
The majority of the households had either a cat or dog. Of those households which owned pets, 67 percent indicated they had a dog and 71 percent said they had a cat. Thirteen percent indicated that they owned a bird and sixteen percent listed other pets such as fish, hamsters, and rabbits. Only eight percent of our respondents indicated that they owned a farm animal.

### Harm to Animals

Nearly half of the 186 women with animals (45.7 percent) said that their partner had deliberately **threatened** to harm their pets or farm animals and, of those, 40.4 percent (38 of the 94 women who answered the questions said that their partner **definitely** did harm or kill the pet. See Graph 14. Another 39 percent (39 of the 101 women who answered the question) said they had reason to believe that their partner had harmed or killed their pet but they did not know for certain. Twenty-eight of the 104 women who answered the question (26.9 percent) said that they were concerned that firearms had been used and fifteen of ninety-nine women (15.2 percent) who answered the question as to whether firearm were actually used or believed to be used responded in the affirmative. In other words, in over three-quarters of the abusive households where the partner made

threats to harm pets, the pets either were actually harmed or killed or the women had reason to believe that this occurred.

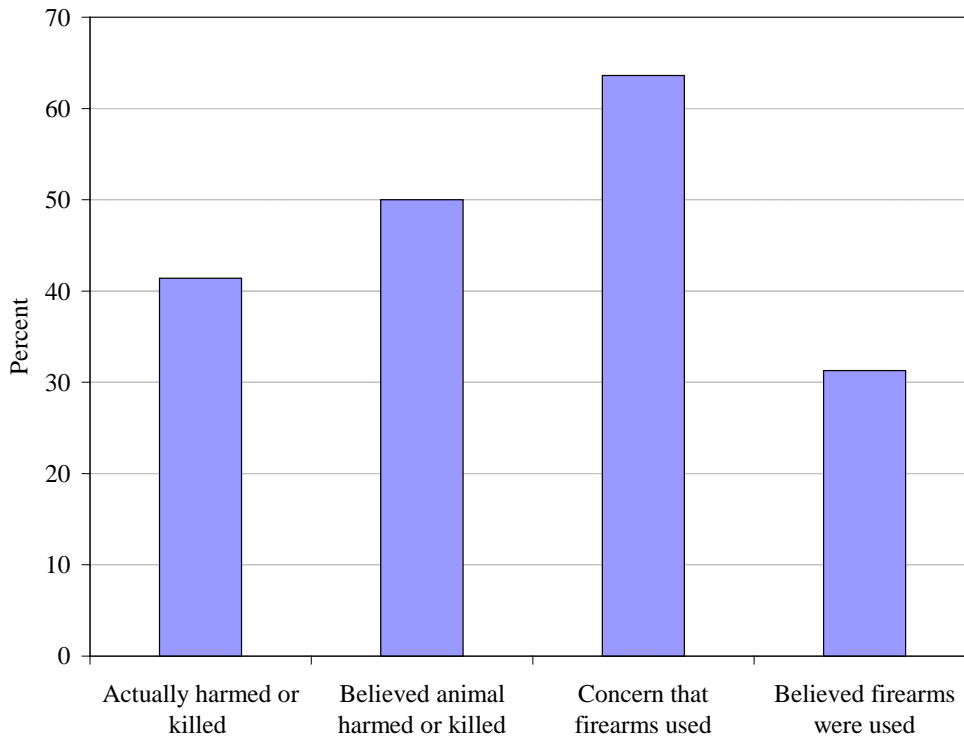
**Graph 14: Harm or Perceived Harm to Animals by Percent – All Households**



### **Firearms and Harm to Pets**

The information above is for all households with pets. However, when we look at households with firearms which also had pets we find that animal abuse is higher. Graph 15 below shows that where firearms were present, a larger percentage of women indicated that their animals had been threatened or harmed.

**Graph 15: Households with Firearms and Threats to Pets by Percent**



Seventy-nine percent of households with firearms also had pets. An analysis of these households where both pets and firearms were present, n=52, shows that over half, 54 percent, indicated that their current partner had deliberately threatened to harm their pets. Of those, 41 percent said definitely that their partner harmed or killed their pet and 50 percent believed that their partner had harmed their pet. Sixty-four percent expressed concern that firearms were used to harm the animal and 31 percent said firearms actually were used or they had reason to believe that firearms were used to harm or kill their pet.

### **Concern for Animals' Safety and Reluctance to Seek Help**

Pets and farm animals often play an important part in women's and children's lives. Especially in abusive homes, animals may be the only source of comfort and unconditional love. As noted above, we found in our previous research (Hornosty & Doherty 2003) that rural and farm women often spoke about how concern for their pets and farm animals affected their decision about leaving an abusive relationship. A significant barrier was the fact that they had had no place to take their animals so as to guarantee their safety. As well, we heard from police and crisis workers anecdotal stories of women whose partners had

harmed or killed the family pet (Hornosty & Doherty 2004). Other research corroborates these findings. Ascione (1998), for example, in his study of abused women at a shelter in Utah found that 71 percent of the women reported actual or threatened harm of their pets. In 1997, Ascione et al reported that almost 25 % of the women who went to a shelter indicated that concern for their pets had made them delay their decision to seek help. In Ontario, an SPCA study found that 61 percent of women fleeing family violence had pets killed or abused by their partner, while 43 percent said their pets were threatened by their abuser and 48 percent delayed leaving their partner because of concerns for the pet (OSPCA, 1998).

To better understand how concern for their pets might affect abused women's decision to seek help, we asked all women who owned pets or farm animals specifically whether they had ever been reluctant to get help or tell someone about their situation because of they were concerned for their animal's safety or well-being. Twenty-seven percent of these women indicated that concern for their animal's well-being did indeed make them more reluctant to seek help for fear that the abuser would harm their animal(s). Twenty-four percent of women with children indicated that their child was aware that an animal had been harmed or threatened with abuse. In homes with children where firearms were present, 39 percent of the women said that their children were aware that an animal was harmed or threatened with abuse

Not surprisingly, in those cases where the partner had deliberately threatened to harm the pets, a larger percentage of the women expressed such reluctance. Just under half (44 percent) of the women in households where their partner deliberately threatened to harm their pet said their decision to get help or tell others about the abuse was affected by their concern for their animal's safety. An even larger number indicated a reluctance to seek help in cases where their partner had actually harmed or killed the pet or farm animal. See Table 20 below.

**Table 20: Reluctance to Tell Others and Concern for Pets by Percentage**

<b>Those who indicated reluctance in different situations (percent)</b>	
<b>Partner deliberately threatened to harm pets</b>	<b>43.7 (n=87)</b>
<b>Partner actually harmed or killed</b>	<b>60.0 (n=40)</b>
<b>Believed that partner harmed or killed</b>	<b>52.5 (n=40)</b>
<b>Concern about firearms being used</b>	<b>69.0 (n=29)</b>
<b>Firearms were used/ believed to be used</b>	<b>40.0 (n=15)</b>

Sixty percent of women who said that their pet was actually harmed or killed, indicated that they were reluctant to seek help or tell someone about their situation because of concerns for their animal(s) safety and well-being. For each sub-question the number of actual cases is small; however, the responses uniformly show that concern for animals and their safety has an impact on women make decisions to get out of abusive relationships. Of those who lived in households where there were firearms and indicated that their partner had deliberately threatened to harm a pet, 52 percent indicated they hesitated to talk to others about their situation because of concerns for the pet’s safety. Sixty-two percent of these women also indicated that their partner had actually harmed or killed the pet or farm animal.

In summary, our survey data suggest threats to pets and farm animals safety is a powerful way to intimidate, control and abuse women. The situation is more pronounced when firearms are present. In homes with firearms, more women said that their partner had deliberately threatened to harm the animals or actually did harm them than in homes without firearms. Sixty-four percent were concerned that firearms could be used to harm or kill their pet and nearly one-third indicated that they knew that firearms were used or they had reason to believe that firearms had been used. As with our findings about the relationship between firearms abuse and the impact on women, the data we gathered from our survey on pet abuse and its affect on abused women is corroborated by information we gathered in focus groups and interviews in the qualitative part of our study.

## **SECTION 3 – QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS: INTERVIEWS WITH WOMEN AND SERVICE PROVIDERS AND FOCUS GROUPS**

### **3.1 Characteristics of Rural Communities**

The participants in this study lived in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Many of them had grown up in rural communities or on farms in these provinces or elsewhere. A few of the participants had never lived in small towns or rural communities and some had moved from other provinces. Although the analysis of our quantitative data was based on defined parameters of what constituted a rural community or small town (a town with a population of less than 10,000 people), in the interviews and focus groups we encouraged participants to tell us their own perceptions of living in a rural or urban community and what characteristics differentiate them? Since the majority of participants in the current study lived in what were perceived to be small towns and rural areas, it is not surprising that we received mostly descriptions of “rural life”. As in other studies, we suggest that quantitative definitions of ‘rural’ are complemented by common sense descriptive terms or self-identification. Most people tend to intuitively “refer to the countryside or small towns as opposed to cities” (Jiwani 1998). A study about the delivery of family violence law information in rural areas notes, “Clearly, a strict demographic and quantitative definition is not required to define ‘rural’” (Doherty 2002). Many of the participants in our study agreed that one’s sense of belonging to a rural community was somewhat subjective:

I think that the word rural is very subjective. So someone that comes from Toronto and now lives in Charlottetown thinks that this is just a small hick town. But someone that comes from Charlottetown and moves to [a village] thinks that it is very small... But when you're talking about rural, I think that it is very relative to what the person's experience is. So for someone that has never been, like, to Toronto, Charlottetown's a big thing to them.<sup>19</sup>

Several people told us that the physical characteristics of the places where they live differentiate rural and urban. Many described the natural beauty of their rural communities, the peace and tranquility of their farms, the woods, the magnificent sunsets,

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<sup>19</sup> Charlottetown, the capital of Prince Edward Island, according to the 2006 population Census has a population of 32,174.



walks on the beach, and strolling down a country lane with their dog. We were told that most rural people love ‘outdoor life’ (riding on all terrain vehicles, snowmobiling, fishing, hunting, etc.)<sup>20</sup>. The ‘hunting culture’ or ‘gun culture’, which is often viewed as a defining characteristic of rural life, will be described later. One woman said what she liked best about living in a rural community was:

....the fishing season....what is called ‘first morning’, the boats go out for 6 a.m., so at 5:30 everybody from town goes down to the harbor and we watch all the boats line up and they’re blessed from the priest, and they’re all lined up and at 6 a.m. precisely, they leave. And we all wave, and it’s just, a community thing, the first morning they go out, everybody’s there, taking part.

Friendliness was another common characteristic of rural communities. Those we talked to who grew up in small towns and rural communities consistently referred to their communities as “close-knit” or having “strong inter-connections” or simply that “everybody knows everybody”. As several people told us, “when you drive through town, you are waving to everybody you see”. We were also told that independence and loyalty to families and friends are characteristic of people living in rural communities. This means that people do not interfere in their neighbour’s personal or family lives; however, they are always willing to lend a hand in other ways. This reinforces another much valued characteristic of rural life which is the feeling of ‘safety’ - people look out for one another. A police officer in the study confirmed that neighborly concern is quick to arise.

If there was a strange car in the driveway, we would get a call to tell us who was behind the wheel, what they're doing, if they scratched their head, got out to kick the tire. We'd get that information. And it's all because, well y'know, that car's never been in her yard before.

Although many participants told us that they valued the way neighbours look out for one another, they also had to cope with “the busy-body factor”.

Another common characteristic of small communities was that people hold ‘rural values’ which to most participants translated into strong ‘family values’ (this will be discussed in greater detail in the next section). In fact, there was considerable agreement

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<sup>20</sup> Environment Canada reports that in 1996: Residents of New Brunswick spent \$208.2 million on nature-related activities. In total, New Brunswick residents spent \$32.6 million hunting wildlife in 1996. The average hunter spent \$415 during the year, or \$25 per day of participation. Residents of Prince Edward Island spent \$24.6 million on nature-related activities. In total, Prince Edward Island residents spent \$1.9 million hunting wildlife (birds). Both New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island were below the national average in average spending on nature-related activities. Statistics Canada (2003) Survey on the Importance of Nature to Canadians <http://www.ec.gc.ca/nature/9EconoBen.htm>.

that “raising kids in this environment [a rural community] is very safe. I mean compared to in a city”.

Despite being described as close-knit, another common feature of rural life is the sense of isolation from others. Several interviewees explained that even where the geographic distance between homes was not great, a woman could still feel isolated. Consistently we heard that rural families tend to “stick together” because there is limited access to outside supports. Out of necessity, rural families tend to be more independent and resourceful than people living in urban communities. They know how to make their own entertainment, in part because there is often no transportation and limited access to local malls, movies, recreation and other services. Indeed, most people agreed that rural communities are characterized by a lack of services, such as hospitals, mental health clinics, and even policing services:

When you talk about ‘rural communities’, you know you live in a rural community, when you see two RCMP cars going in one direction, you can do anything you want in the other direction.

However, for others who had moved to small towns in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, or even people who had moved within their provinces, the sense of community and belonging could be difficult to establish. Participants claimed that many people move to the country because they have idealistic dreams of entering into a close-knit community. However, this is usually something that only partially comes true:

...although they're close to their neighbours, they don't have a relationship with these neighbours. Because a lot of families socialize amongst each other, and it's sorta hard to break in, because there's these groups that already pre-existed out of families and extended families... basically what it is, is they're not lookin' for new friends.

One person explained that although he had lived in a particular rural community for many years, and his kids had been born there, that he (and possibly his children) would “always be a PFA - a ‘person from away’ - because I'm not from here.” Another interviewee who moved to a rural community said that it was hard to feel accepted because “they become very cliquish, and if you're not born and raised there, then you're on the outside.”

Ironically, it seems that while people from urban areas find rural communities friendly, but somewhat “stand-offish”, several participants who were originally from a rural community and who had moved to a larger town or urban area, found people in cities to be ‘cold’ and ‘snobbish’. Urban areas were certainly seen to offer many advantages, yet

despite the close proximity of neighbours, a number of people described a sense of isolation living in an urban community:

I think the city is very clean, but I find people very snobbish and cliquish and I don't know how many people I've invited home for coffee and tried to be friends with and people don't like making friends in this city...So I don't enjoy that part of living here. I feel very isolated here in the city, people aren't friendly, for the most part. You run into the odd person that is friendly, but they're usually from out of town.

As we later demonstrate in this study, almost all of these positive aspects of rural life can sometimes serve as barriers to women who are experiencing violence and abuse in their families.

### **Community Values**

In our early studies, we uncovered a range of cultural and social factors associated with rural and farm life that create barriers or challenges for women living in or leaving abusive relationships (Hornosty & Doherty, 2004; Doherty & Hornosty, 2004; Hornosty & Doherty, 2003). Similar to other studies, our current research reaffirms the importance of looking at the social and culture context of abuse and understanding community values and norms (Biesenthal et al., 2000; Jiwani, 1998; Logan, Walker, & Leukelfeld, 2000; Martz & Sarauer 2000). Factors such as geographic isolation, lack of resources, attitudes and beliefs about family, and stereotypes about women's roles in society make it more difficult for rural women to 'name' abuse or leave abusive situations.

Similar factors emerged in our current study. Participants consistently described their rural communities as having collective and conservative values that often created a keen sense of "loyalty" to family and friends. This high degree of social cohesiveness in the rural communities in our study area seemed to fostered greater value consensus and less acceptance of diversity. In many cases, value consensus was created around a faith community:

Like, the church I belong to, we help each other and really...everybody's there for each other. It's constantly getting calls of, can you help me with this...and it's, yes, yes, yes. If anybody needs help, there is people there for them. There's just never any avoidance that way. And that is what I prefer for my children.

Gender stereotyping is still common in many rural communities and this was seen to encourage submissive and subservient roles for women that revolve around the household and family.

It's changing. But there's still some of the expectations that you get married, you get married for life, you put up with whatever you have to. Especially within families with a strong religious base, which a lot of rural communities is. ...

This is consistent with other researchers who have found patriarchal attitudes to be more entrenched in rural communities most likely due to the absence of other competing ideologies (Websdale 1998, p.93). One participant described the very rigid gender role expectations that she was expected to assume upon marriage.

The family that I married into, like she was a farmer's wife, but he was the one who went out, he bought the groceries, she stayed at home with the kids.... I don't think I ever remember them being out anywhere together, he did everything, you know. He was the head of the house. So when I got married, I think my husband expected me to be like her, and of course I was totally opposite, so we had friction all through our marriage....but, it just seems like the whole family, the girls, they were, you know, they stayed at home and they raised the kids and, they didn't dare even, you know, say a cross word to their husbands or anything.

Another service provider expressed concern about some of her clients who were farm wives, in large part because of the demeaning treatment that she felt they endured.

Farmers think more highly of their farm than they actually do sometimes of their wives - and their animals - because it's almost like their animal is more valuable than their wife, cuz you've got animals that are worth \$20,000 or more, right? And so, even in that kind of structure, I mean, there is some good farmers out there that love their families, but, the situations that I see, a lot of them are not that case. And even the way that a woman is treated...the whole farm situation was...hard on her, so her whole self-esteem worth was nothing.

Because rural communities are small and isolated, women often "marry in" to families or farms outside of their own communities. As a result, the pressure to demonstrate loyalty to their husband's family is intense. When a home is experiencing "problems", the wife is often blamed since it is her job to create a harmonious household.

Usually their values and their beliefs about family is strong, and they usually know the partner's family. So when someone is faced with the potential of leaving their situation, a lot of times one of the barriers is not only that partner, but to leave that partner's family. And they get a lot of pressure.

In one focus group, several of the participants talked about “the busy body factor” and how the gossip and finger pointing that accompanies marital strife, typically amounts to blaming women “for making trouble”.

I have noticed ... that with the family stuff, and a lot of fear around what if they separate, is she going to get what was always our family home? You know there's a whole lot of things that people start to sort of bring up and throw at the woman – ‘you know, you're just trying to ruin us all’, or whatever. So, yeah, community can be big too. They might say we don't believe in violence, but then when it comes to a woman making a move, the stories that are coming back to her, the stuff that she's hearing, is that she's creating trouble, right.

### 3.2 The Culture of Firearms in Rural Communities

When women and service providers spoke to us about the presence of firearms in abusive homes, they did so within a social and cultural framework that they referred to as the “gun culture” or a “hunting culture”. Consistently, we were told about the positive value that people typically associate with firearms ownership. Most of the participants in our study, when asked about the purpose and use of firearms in rural communities, spoke of a long standing tradition of hunting. In New Brunswick this refers to hunting a variety of wildlife and in Prince Edward Island it is mostly bird-hunting. They explained that most rural homes own a variety of long guns for this purpose, or for other peaceful pursuits such as target practice and pest control. Firearms are often passed down from one generation to the next. Even people who did not own firearms and had grown up in urban areas recognized the connection that rural people have toward their firearms.

I didn't grow up with it [firearms and hunting], so it's really hard to understand the connection that some people have to their firearms, but I think it's very [strong]. Some of them love them.

Many of the participants had grown up around firearms, valued them, and saw nothing frightening about them. Several of the abused women that we interviewed explained that, until they began to live in a home where firearms were used to control and intimidate them, they too felt no fear of firearms. As one interviewee explained:

I didn't think of the firearms as being a negative thing because I'd had them with my father, I had them with my grandparents...At the farm we knew that animals were shot for food. We never thought...well I never thought of firearms as something that could be turned on people.

Several participants felt that hunting had declined from the days when their own fathers – and mothers – were avid hunters. As one person said, these days “not everyone in our town is walking around in plaid shirts and wearing orange hats during hunting season”. Moreover, some interviewees felt that a significant portion of those with firearms who go out hunting “never shoot a deer”<sup>21</sup>. As one person explained, the only “moose head” that

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<sup>21</sup> The NB Department of Natural Resource reports that in 2005-06 New Brunswick residents obtained 48,804 deer licences, 3,207 moose licenses, and 1,920 bear licences, as well as 9,110 licences for small game and 4,503 for varmint. Given that only 6,881 deer were bagged by residents that season, the assertion that many people are out in the woods hunting but do not shoot a deer is fairly accurate. Natural Resources, 2005-2006 Annual Report <http://www.gnb.ca/0078/publications/AnnualReport05-06-ef.pdf> . Prince Edward Island does not have big game hunting as there are no deer or moose on the island.

most hunters get these days comes in a six-pack<sup>22</sup>. They felt that the tradition of hunting has become as much an opportunity for getting together with friends, going out into the woods and drinking rather than actually shooting game. Promoting camaraderie, for the most part among men, was cited as an important aspect of the hunting culture.

As noted earlier, many people in this study described the presence of firearms for use on the farm, and the love of the outdoor life, fishing and hunting, as a common feature of rural life. Clearly, the generally positive perspective and relaxed attitudes towards firearms are what characterize “*the culture of firearms*”. Most of the participants felt strongly that individuals in rural communities use firearms for peaceful purposes. Indeed, a few of the participants initially reacted rather defensively to our questions about firearms. Were we trying to slur or undermine a valued rural tradition? After all, we were told, “... there are lots of people that have firearms in their homes and it never becomes a tool for control.” To diffuse this reaction, we started our discussions, particularly in the focus groups and most definitely whenever the principal investigators made presentations on preliminary findings, with an explanation of the purpose of the study which emphasized that the study was not against guns or hunting, nor was it about gun control. A number of people felt it was important to explain their resistance to the gun registry in rural communities. While their opposition could be attributed in part to the expense associated with registering the guns, some suggested it was really something that could only truly be understood in light of the “gun culture” and rural traditions. One person explained:

People are against the gun registry because its government control over people's lives. So, rural people, I think, they value their choices, that they could make. I don't [think]... it' the gun registry itself...it's to be able to make the decision to have it.

Interestingly, it is this common “pastoral” view of “peaceful” firearms ownership in Canada that is so often contrasted with firearms ownership and usage in the United States. In the USA, a high proportion of firearms are kept purportedly for protection and personal safety, whereas national studies of gun ownership in Canada show that firearms, especially long guns, are owned by older men for hunting, target practice, and pest control (Hung, 2000). However, we discovered that firearms have other, sometimes less positive, usages. Despite the depiction of rural gun owners as hunters, we also heard from several

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<sup>22</sup> Moosehead is a popular local Maritime beer.

interviewees that people keep firearms to provide a degree of protection. Several participants told us that, although some people have guns for hunting, they also have them on hand for protection. One abused woman told us that her partner told her that he kept a handgun “to shoot somebody if they came into the house”. Several participants spoke about an increase in crime in their small town and people’s concern for personal protection<sup>23</sup>. As one police officer explained:

A lot of people, especially if you don’t live right in town, like if you live on the outskirts, they have them because they think that something is going to happen and that’s their only means of protection.

In one focus group, a participant explained why she thought people were keeping guns for protection:

I think people want to have a gun in their house to feel safe...there’s a ...drug problem and it still is such a big thing and there’s a lot of B and E’s - a lot of people breaking into houses. And it really was a big issue. I think it’s getting better but it still is a great big issue. There’s a lot of lunatics out there, really.

This concern about crime and personal safety may reflect a trend that has been apparent for the past ten years, and was reported in a recent Statistics Canada study comparing crime in large urban, small urban and rural areas<sup>24</sup>. The study found that the highest overall crime rates, with the exception of auto theft, were found in small urban areas. The study notes that crime was 43% higher in small towns than in large urban areas, and 58% higher than in rural areas. Moreover, the rates of total violent crime, total property crime and break-ins were also highest in small urban areas.

When asked about the reason for firearms in people’s homes, a few of those interviewed said that their partners were not hunters, they just kept guns. One abused woman whom we interviewed noted that her partner kept guns because:

...he’s a nut. He likes power. He likes to be powerful. He thinks he’s so big and cool and scary.

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<sup>23</sup> On March 23, 2007 a retired New Brunswick man was acquitted of manslaughter charges for shooting and killing a would-be burglar at his home outside Sussex. His lawyer “argued that his client did not mean to kill anyone, and that people who live in the country can’t count on police to show up quickly so they often keep guns to protect themselves.”

<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/new-brunswick/story/2007/03/23/nb-masonverdict.html>

<sup>24</sup> The *Juristat*: "A Comparison of Large Urban, Small Urban and Rural Crime Rates, 2005," Vol. 27, no. 3, (85-002-XIE, free) <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/070628/d070628b.htm>



A police officer confirmed that not all gun owners are hunters. He explained,

I think it's probably more of a manly thing to have guns, and sometimes the puffy chest syndrome, you know? And come and see my gun collection. There's a few people I know that are like that...

Another interviewee, a service provider, explained,

Some men have firearms and don't hunt – they have them for power and status; this is more in rural homes.

Although there is nothing “illegal” about having firearms for prestige (unless of course they are not licensed or registered), several participants discussed the sense of risk and fear that may be created by the presence of firearms for such “legal” pursuits. For example, one woman explained that people who have guns for protection can get “jumpy” and that they will fire indiscriminately:

...people, animals, anything - or wind - it seems like for a lot of people. So the wind comes and the gun's out. Like it's pretty scary.

She also noted that people commonly use their guns for target practice and that this too can be a dangerous pursuit:

I've seen a lot of people just pulling them out in the woods and shooting randomly. My [friend], that's how he got shot actually, in the shoulder. There was a young lad and he had a shotgun and he was using it for target practice and shot in the woods and shot my [friend].

Another abused woman said her partner kept a handgun for “target shooting...he kept it loaded in the underwear drawer.” In another focus group, the participants discussed how controversial guns could be in a community when they were used “inappropriately” such as threatening to kill a partner's pet – “perfectly legal so long as it is done humanely”,<sup>25</sup>. Another example of how firearms contributed to a general sense of fear is when they are used to kill a neighbour's pet who wanders onto their property.

The fellas across the road have birds, and if a coyote or a fox comes into their yard, they shoot the coyote or the fox. But one day, a [dog] came wondering in, and they shot the [dog] and it belonged to the neighbour down the road. Huge kafuffle about that.

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<sup>25</sup> This assertion that people have the right to destroy their own property and pets, or to kill animals that wandered onto their property, was made by the police officers in this study and confirmed by other police officers who were consulted about this – as long as other laws were not broken, such as reckless use of the firearm, etc.

To summarize, most of the seventy-two people we spoke to in focus groups and interviews during the qualitative part of this study felt that rural folk in both New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island have a strong attachment to their firearms, most often long guns, and that firearms can be found in abundance in rural homes – registered or otherwise. Most people hold positive sentiments about firearms; however, many people tend to hold a rather cavalier attitude towards the storage of firearms and it is not uncommon to find firearms unlocked, in easy reach of children with ammunition on hand. Firearms seem to be kept increasingly for personal safety and some of the participants expressed concerns that this might contribute to accidental shootings. In homes where there are mental health problems or abuse, the threat of firearms misuse, even indirectly, was seen to contribute to a heightened sense of fear and risk of lethality.

### 3.3 Family Violence – The Rural Experience

Everybody pretty well knows in a small rural area who's getting beaten, where you're going to be on a Saturday night, everybody knows that. But still, that sense of pride is there. They won't reach out for help, and if anyone approaches them, including sometimes, the well-meaning minister of a church, they will deny it. It's very common for it just to be a total non-issue.

In households experiencing conflict or abuse, women are often reluctant to ask for help. There are many reasons for this reluctance. Lack of community support is often cited. Most of the participants in this study agreed that family violence is a situation that people in rural communities might agree is abhorrent, but for abused women, it still generates little sympathy.

People don't know, they don't take it seriously enough...if you go around saying you were abused or there was a firearm involved, they're just 'Oh, that must have been bad.' And that's it. You know. They really don't take notice.

One participant suggested that it is not a matter of people in rural communities not caring that women are experiencing violence in their lives. The real issue is that people just do not know how to respond it.

I think the community cares. I really do. I think the community doesn't, you know, by any means condone it. I don't think that's something that they like to see. But at the same time, I don't think the community really wants to deal with the issues, of such. They prefer to see something like the transition house or a committee or something handle it.

A common feature of rural communities is the lack of individual privacy and anonymity. This can create a sense of cohesion and familiarity among people, but it can also foster the feeling that "everyone knows everybody's business". Many participants spoke of this as the two-edged sword of rural life.

I have lived in a rural community all of my life. What I feel is two fold...a community that is close knit, they have a lot of support there, but then again, people talk, people know everything, they're interested in everything that you do. So, if you're a victim of family violence, what I noticed in my line of work anyways, it's very difficult for people in rural areas to call for help, because they see the police car in the driveway, and everybody in the community knows by the next morning. Whereas, [in urban areas], nobody cares. Not necessarily that they don't care, but who's in the apartment next door? You don't know those people. But in a small community everybody knows everybody ...

Thus, it is not surprising that many of the abused women we spoke to felt that they are under constant community scrutiny. This can make it difficult to seek confidential

assistance, and it often puts women into a state of constant hyper-vigilance. Some women found dealing with the “gossip” about their abuse very upsetting.

Everybody knows your business or thinks they do... that’s how the bad stories start, and problems just escalate from there. I love all the people, like the people in general are really friendly, as compared to a big city. But it’s just how things escalate here. I don’t like that.

There is most definitely a stigma associated both with being an abused wife, and with not being able to create harmony in your home. Calling the police for help during a violent situation is often considered a betrayal. Many participants gave examples of family violence where women were chastised for shaming their families. A participant in one focus group explained:

Well, I mean, it's a family name, and you don't let that out. To know that there's something wrong with the family....let's kinda keep that quiet and let's ignore it and I think that happens a lot.

A police officer in the focus group added:

And the other thing, too, is that the anger's not focused at her, it's now switching to you, and now you gotta deal with this thing...

Patriarchal norms are strong in rural communities. We were told that when women marry, particularly when they are joining their husband’s community, they are expected to “tow the line”. A sense of community can be localized and very intense. No matter how long one might live there, a person who marries into the community is still “from away” – even if away is only 40 kilometers down the road. One woman who grew up in a rural community and who had to bus into town to attend high school describes the feeling of being an outsider – “the country bumpkin” who was shunned by classmates - a feeling that continued into her marriage to a man from another rural community.

And, then you’re in a rural situation where you’re with all of *their* family, none of yours. They take your vehicle, they threaten you. They do the, “well if you leave, then it’s gonna be you or the kids,” or “you’re not gonna walk out on me, cuz I’m gonna make sure, this and that”....Ballin’ my head off, thinking, “I cannot believe I am in this situation”, scared to death to leave, because, it was all *his* family.

I had told them, you know, you guys have gotta help me, because ... you guys are all I have. You’re right next door. They didn’t wanna do anything until they had seen that it was our children who were starting to get the abuse. They could see me with bruises...they seen him take me and pin me against [the wall] and they seen him take me and literally choke

me so the next day his hand print was bruised in my neck, and they still refused to help me...they said, "You're a big girl. If you want out, you leave". But not realizing...the fear...I was not leaving that situation unless I took my kids with me.

Not only are abused women fearful about calling the police, we also heard that friends and neighbours can be fearful. There is a concern that even though one might try to make a confidential report, soon everyone would know. In the section of this report on experiences with the police, we discuss how the prevalence of police scanners in rural homes is a deterrent to reporting family violence. People were reluctant to call for help since "everyone" would know who called and what the police are doing. If a man has a violent temper, even if it is "only when he's drinking", the entire community may be fearful of retribution if they try to intervene or call for help. In some instances, people in the study actually felt that the police were fearful of certain families.

That's actually happening in our community, with a family, where, they're pretty sure there's abuse, I mean, you know it, but people are afraid because it is isolation. The male, in that situation, is very violent, can be. I stopped [the neighbor] one day and talked to her - but she said they don't dare to call, because if anybody came out, he would know that it was them... and he would come after them with a gun. But it's a real, real fear, and we don't have police come out and patrol. There's never any sign of any cops unless there's an incident and they're called out. So there is, it's too late.

Rural women who are experiencing abuse are not only physically isolated, they are frequently socially isolated as well. Even in boyfriend-girlfriend relationships, women spoke of feeling trapped, controlled and isolated by their partner:

I had about 4 friends, and my friends that I had were the friends of his guy friends. Those were the only ones I was allowed to have. And it eventually became that they weren't even allowed to call my house.

Many of the women spoke about their reluctance to disclose the abuse because of feelings of embarrassment and the stigma that they felt attached to being an abused woman. Most felt that this is more acute in a rural environment. One woman noted: "It was embarrassing that I was actually with someone who would act like that, and, that I put up with it. I guess that was probably the most embarrassing part." Another interviewee explained, "I felt stupid. I never thought it would happen to me, but they can be so charming and you can get caught in it."

Many of the women we interviewed felt that people tend to blame the victim. One police officer described a case he worked on:

The person was a very well-to-do business person in the community. I had to arrest the individual and incarcerate him and take him before the judge the next day and he was released. I mean this was a person of stature in the community and no one knew what was going on inside of that house. But, the next day, everybody knew what had happened and how it reflected on this individual's life in a very small community...[he] was basically shunned from the community. I remember dealing with her at the end of it, and I think she felt shunned as well. Like, I don't think the support mechanisms were there.

Some participants did find support from people in their community. One woman, whose husband was sent to prison, stayed in the relationship because he was getting treatment in prison for alcohol and drug addictions. Moreover, while her husband was imprisoned, she was she free from abuse and able to benefit from community support:

Actually some of the people from the church, particularly from that group, have been very supportive, and they visited him in jail and you know everybody kept in touch with him and that was a really good thing for him, to know that he had some good support out here.

### **Experiences Accessing Services**

One of the common challenges that the women in this study identified was their inability to access services, in large part because of dwindling number of services generally in geographical isolated rural communities. While certainly not as much of a concern in urban area, this lack of access to services has become a defining characteristic of rural communities. Many of the women we interviewed were living in communities where it was difficult to obtain a broad range of services that might help them to address the abuse and violence in their lives and that of their children. Not surprisingly, many of them commented on the challenges posed by geographical factors.

### **3.4 Experiences with Pet and Farm Animal Abuse**

She loved her pets, like, she had a house cat and a dog...he would always threaten to kill [her dog] if she left. And, he would describe the dog's death very violently, and, you know, it was really graphic. I remember thinking, "Oh my word, like, that is astounding". I never thought of animals as being as part of that situation of abuse.

One aspect of this study has been to explore how the presence of pets and farm animals affects the decision-making of abused women, particularly rural women in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. In our earlier studies on family violence in farm and rural communities in New Brunswick (see Doherty, Hornosty & McCallum, 1997; Hornosty & Doherty, 2004; Doherty & Hornosty, 2004; Hornosty & Doherty, 2003), many of the abused rural and farm women interviewed reported a cycle of intimidation that was often characterized by threats of harm. In many cases, these threats extended to family pets and farm animals. Unfortunately, this tactic appears to be an effective strategy for controlling one's partner since many of the women further reported that they were reluctant to leave or go to transition house for fear that the pets would suffer, or the farm animals might be killed or neglected. Moreover, women in our earlier study had suggested that the prevalence of firearms in rural homes made threats to harm the pets, children, property or her all the more menacing.

There has not been a great deal of research in this area, particularly in relation to victims of family violence living in rural communities and the link that family violence might have to animal abuse. Nevertheless, there are a number of studies that have examined the connection between family violence and animal abuse (Arkow, 1996; McIntosh, 2002; Gullone, Volant, & Johnson, 2006; Faver & Strand, 2003; Flynn, 2000; Ascione Et Al., 1997; Ascione, 1998). A 2001 study of women entering shelters in Calgary found that 41% of the 100 respondents had owned a pet, and a quarter of these pet owners had delayed seeking help because of concerns for the safety of their pet (MacIntosh: 2001). By comparison, 70% of the women in our survey owned a pet. This may reflect the fact that 78% of the women who answered our survey questions lived in

small towns and rural areas where pet ownership may indeed be higher than in large cities and urban areas<sup>26</sup>.

In Ontario, an SPCA study found that 61% of women fleeing family violence had pets killed or abused by their partner, while 43% said their pets were threatened by their abuser and 48% delayed leaving their partner because of concerns for their pet (OSPCA, 1998). This study was replicated in 2000 with similar results (Daniell, 2001). Although only 41% of the women in our current survey indicated that their pets had been harmed or killed, the fact that another 39% thought their partners had killed or harmed their pets would suggest that the degree of “animal lethality” that we uncovered could be much closer than the numbers suggest. Again, this might reflect an urban–rural discrepancy as the above-mentioned studies were in urban areas.

Some studies in United States have also found a link to animal abuse. One study noted that, “a significant proportion of a sample of women seeking safety at a shelter for battered partners have experienced their partners’ threatened or actual maltreatment of pets” (Ascione; 1998). Studies that do make the link between family violence and animal abuse tend to explore only the link to abuse of household pets, and not to farm animals, perhaps because they did not involve participants from rural areas (See Ascione, 1998; Daniell, 2001; MacIntosh, 2001; OSPCA, 1998). Moreover, none of these studies have looked at the connection between threats and harm to animals, the presence of firearms in the home, and the lethality of the threats. This is a particularly dangerous omission for abused women living in rural homes where it appears that pet ownership is considerably higher than in urban homes, and where firearms are considerably more prevalent as well.

The current study attempts to fill this research gap by exploring linkages among particular variables such as rurality, firearms victimization, addictions, suicide threats, and animal abuse, with a view to determining if, and how, they are associated with family violence. Our quantitative data confirmed that many of the women in our study had pets. We specifically designed the current survey to ask participants about farm animals. We found that 8% of the women who indicated in the survey that they had animals, owned

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<sup>26</sup> In a comparison of rural and urban household expenditure patterns in 1996, Statistics Canada reports that rural households had significantly higher expenses on pets than urban households and that 66% of rural homes reported pet expenses compared to 44% of urban homes. Statistics Canada, 1999, *The Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin*, Vol.1, #4, p.8 <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/21-006-XIE/21-006-XIE1998004.pdf>



farm animals such as pigs, horses, cattle, chickens and geese. Overall, of the women who answered the survey question about the presence of pets and farm animals, 70% reported having pets or farm animals in their homes. Of these women, over 40% said that their partner had threatened their pets and/or had actually harmed or killed them. About 15% of the women indicated that the animal(s) had been killed with a firearm, while almost 40% thought that a firearm had been used but were not certain.

The uncertainty expressed by women about whether or how their pets had been killed most likely reflects the fact that abused women tend to leave the abusive relationship for short reprieves and then return – sometimes to find the pet has ‘gone missing’ during the separation. Indeed, our survey data reveal that of the 347 women who answered the question about the number of separations from their partner, 99% had at least one previous separation, while 30% had 4 or more separations. Given that almost all of the abused women in our survey had separated and returned to their partner, it is perhaps not surprising that a high proportion (39%) were not sure how their pet had been killed. Upon returning, they may have been too afraid to ask what happened, or they may have been told that the pet wandered off. Nevertheless, many believed that their partner had probably shot the pet. The presence of firearms in their homes made these threats all the more ominous.

The interviews and focus groups conducted in this study help us to understand the ways in which threats to harm or kill family pets and farm animals act as a deterrent to the help-seeking behaviour of abused women. These stories create a poignant and alarming picture of what it is like to lose a beloved pet. As one woman explained:

When they (the dogs) did things he'd kick them until they were crying. And if I went over to comfort them, he wouldn't let me, and I'd have to go out, and I would cry, and I couldn't stand it...When I was in the hospital, he shot her and he didn't tell me... He took her back in the woods and gave her a piece of meat and shot her. My father had to tell me a few days later. He didn't even have the guts to tell me.

Our survey data demonstrated that concern for the well-being of their pets or farm animals affected women's decision-making, but we were not able to determine in what manner. Were women more likely to disclose and seek help, or were they less likely to disclose? Fortunately, the interviews and focus groups have provided valuable insights into some of the ways that pet abuse can affect the decision-making of the abused women. Some of the women interviewed told us that they delayed seeking assistance or going to a

transition house because of concern for the safety of their pets.

Some women explained how the presence of farm animals affected their decision to leave. As one woman who owned farm animals noted, it may be possible to find somebody to care for your pet, but “where can you go with a horse or chickens or sheep?” Another woman who owned horses explained that when the abuse in her life became intolerable and she felt like leaving, she would always go home because of the animals.

I knew I was in for it that evening when I got home...but I had to go because I had to feed the horses...

Interviewees could articulate the nature of the control that their partners had over them when they abused their pets.

He was never physically abusive to me or my child and he was never rough or anything like that...It was always with the animals that he...got rough and extremely violent. Basically it was controlling me through my animals is what it was because if I did something wrong he'd take it out on like kittens that are 4 months old. He would hit them and kick them. If I did something he didn't like, boom to the cat...He ended up killing one.

One woman explained how her partner would bring the animals to her whenever she left because he knew she was unable to look after them. It was his way to control her.

I went to visit a friend of mine once at his trailer, at his mother's trailer, and my husband brought the dogs to the trailer, in the taxi, dropped them off, and went back home. Because he knew that by dropping the animals off I'd have to bring the animals back home and I'd have to come back home to him. It was the control. He controlled me with the animals.

Some of the women interviewed described the fear that they felt when their partner threatened their pet. Sometimes their fear was greater for the animal than it was for their personal safety. Witnessing or anticipating the abuse of their animals hurt them more than being physically assaulted themselves. Many of the focus group participants were also aware of instances where a woman's pet or farm animal was threatened. One service provider explained that she had counselled a woman whose partner abused her pet because it was more effective in controlling her than actually hurting her.

He kicked the dog because he knew that would upset her more than if he kicked her. Besides, he knew that the police wouldn't do anything about the dog, but they would if he kicked her.

Several of the women whose pets were abused told us that they were fearful of calling the police or animal protection authorities because the abuser might decide to kill

the animal. One woman, whose dog was being abused, eventually discovered that her neighbours were aware of the abuse. She encouraged them to call the authorities.

... my next door neighbors...her husband kept coming over here with dog treats, and that was unusual. Because they pretty much keep to themselves, unless I go over. I told him kinda what happened, not really details. Then they told me they saw him hitting the dog...and that's the reason he kept coming over was to keep checking on that dog. Well, why didn't you call the authorities? Well I didn't, because of you. Well I said, well next time, please do that because I stopped him every time I saw it, and was hoping it was stopped, but I didn't have any idea what you saw. Evidently, he hadn't stopped. But I would have preferred that he didn't leave it to me to do it... make it harder for me. But now he knows.

However, some of the women thought that calling for help would end up being counterproductive. The police had told them that it is not against the law for a man to humanely “put down his own animal” – just as it is “not against the law for a man to smash his own property”. Viewing property as belonging to the man may be more likely to occur where couples are not legally married as was the case with a significantly high proportion of the women in this study who were in common-law relationships. Participants felt that under normal circumstances people should have these rights; but in family violence situations, common sense should prevail and charges should be laid. Such limitations on police powers in family violence cases make victims of abuse feel helpless and hopeless.

One woman told us that her partner teased and tormented her animals and that this treatment eventually affected their personalities as she watched her precious animals grow fearful and aggressive. She felt that her partner's behaviour was definitely meant to hurt her. She explained:

I know that when he was bugging my animals and he wasn't even physically hurting them, just when he was bugging them, that upset me more than what he was doing to me [...]

Many of the women interviewed told of being present when their pet was being abused and not being able to intervene for fear of reprisal and personal harm. One young woman described how her partner killed her two pet hamsters.

He put them on strong drugs and then he'd feed them to them over and over and over and over, then nothing, make them withdraw real bad. I'd beg him and I'd just get a slap for it, so...I eventually I'd just cover my face so I couldn't see or hear it, and, I had to ignore it...it was either that or, god knows what would have happened to me.

Indeed, several women suggested that their animals were emotionally abused rather

than abused in any extreme physical manner. Such abuse to the animal is less obvious to outsiders, and it is not as likely to trigger an animal welfare investigation as would brutality to the animal. One woman explained:

At that time I had a mother, a foal, and I had 3 other horses in the field, a yearling ... he went after her with a broom, made it so that she was head shy. This is what they do. It's not just the abuse with a weapon, it's the mental abuse. It's the threats... and then there's no help for people like me that has the pets. Those pets, they mean everything to you. They're not just something that you can just throw away and put down.

In the survey, when women who had pets were asked if they felt that their children were aware that a family pet or farm animal had been harmed or killed by their partner, 24% said yes. One woman we interviewed explained that the constant abuse by her boyfriend, including harming her pets, definitely affected her toddler.

He (the baby) could sense there was something wrong. He cried whenever this guy came near him. He wouldn't sleep without being in bed with me. He wouldn't eat right. Near the end of it, it was quite noticeable.

Although not always linked to abuse of the pets, several women interviewed commented on the negative affect that the domestic violence had on their children. We heard several stories such as this:

They were scared of him because they had seen the way he would go, I mean, if I would say, "oh, there's daddy", they would go and hide behind the furniture. And I thought, "This is getting too much. Like, I can't keep doing this to my kids." And at the end of it...I took all of what I had to take, and, I left.

Several women suggested that pets or farm animals are an important source of comfort for abused women. They provide the women with unconditional love; pets virtually become part of the family. One woman, who eventually left an extremely violent relationship, felt that in many ways, she had survived the abuse because of the comfort that she got from her animals.

They rely on you. Oh, you need them for your mental health! They keep you centered, when things aren't good, in other ways. They can keep you centered and keep you focus on what you have to do, cuz you're not thinking about all the bad things that can happen. You're thinking about all the good things that will happen with them. You're happy to go out and see them. And it keeps you level.

Some women felt that this strong emotional attachment should be better recognized by the service providers to whom they turn to for help. One woman who did not have children

explained that her “pet was as important to her as children are to other abused women”. Because her pets were not recognized as dependents, she was not eligible for some of the programs and services that were offered only to abused women with children.

What made things difficult for me in ways that, in my particular case, is that, they’ve got [transition house], and it’s a shelter for battered women, but you can’t take pets there. And, you just can’t leave your pets, because, who’s going to look after them? I felt like I was being punished because I didn’t have children. There were so many things that I would qualify for if I had children. Because I didn’t—I didn’t have children, I had pets.

When one interviewee was asked whether anyone she had turned to for help had ever expressed concern that her pets were being abused, she explained:

Even the ones that understand about women and kids are rarely concerned about pets. They say “oh it’s an animal. It’s ok, it will be fine” Because ... nobody wants to hurt an animal - no normal person would want to hurt an animal - so you don’t think anyone else would. I didn’t really think about it. And then when it happened, it’s like ‘oh wow, I wonder how many other animals have suffered like this?’ But, if it starts out with an animal, it’s going to end up being people.

When service providers are not aware of the implications of an abused woman’s attachment to her pets or farm animals, they may offer advice or make suggestions that are inappropriate or appear insensitive to the victim of abuse. Some of the women in our study, who reached out to service providers for help, felt doubly victimized when a service provider said “...don’t be foolish, it’s only a dog, the most important thing is for you to get to safety.” One focus group participant explained that if she was in a domestic violence situation and was told by the police to find refuge somewhere without her pet dog, it would prevent her from going.

I’ll tell you ... if I would have to leave my house, I would not go without my dog. There’s no way that I would go —I would definitely stay.

Not all service providers were unaware of the love and attachment of their clients to their pets. Indeed, many of those we interviewed seemed to be well aware that pets and farm animals were threatened and harmed by abusive men as a way to control their partners. However, most transition houses will not allow women to bring their pets because of the potential for other residents to have allergies and for sanitary reasons. They understood that children were upset about leaving their pets behind. Some shelters do allow women to bring in birds and fish, while others do not. A transition house worker said

their policy was absolutely no pets – which meant that sometimes she discovered women, particularly when accompanied by children, “smuggling in” the goldfish. She explained:

Some women went back home [from transition house] because kids wanted to be with their pets. There was a lot of physical abuse of dogs [...] cats - not feeding them or kicking them; animals given away by abusers. [...] Sometimes when a woman left the man would refuse to allow her to take the pet.

Many of the service providers told us about the anguish that women felt when forced to leave their pets or farm animals behind to be neglected or harmed. However, there were simply no programs or safe havens in place, particularly in rural areas, to care for or shelter the pets on a temporary basis. In light of the high proportion of women in our survey whose pets had been harmed, this situation is clearly a significant barrier for abused rural women when they are ready to seek help or leave an abusive relationship – even temporarily. Many of the women interviewed expressed concern that when they decided to leave their partner, they could not take their pets with them. Whether they were leaving to go to a transition house, a friend’s place, a hotel or to stay with family, their pets usually could not accompany them.

One interviewee explained that she had four cats that needed temporary foster care when she was dealing with an abusive situation. When she asked the local animal shelter to take them temporarily, she was told it would cost her \$25 per cat to drop them off.

If you leave them there, they’re there for good. They either adopt them or out put them down. And you’re not going to be able to find \$25 for your cat...because for the 4 cats it would have been \$100 right there. Like if you get any money it’s for - I mean I don’t have that kind of money - that’s a lot of formula and diapers.

This woman kept her cats and her partner later killed one of the kittens. The dilemma of choosing between leaving the abuse or staying to care for an animal was described numerous times. A service provider working with abused women who participated in a focus group told us about a client who had to flee her home with her children and an old dog. She had no way of looking after the dog, no money for food and no where to go with the dog. But she also had no alternative.

They don’t know what they are going to do with him, but they knew that he would kill him- the dog.

Another woman made the decision to flee to the local transition house, leaving her pets. It was not an easy decision. She told us:

I knew I couldn't take my animals. And I was worried because... he'd just leave the dogs out in the yard 40 below..., he didn't care. I had to leave them one night and he had left them outdoors and I had to turn my back on the animals and I had to walk away and get into the car and drive, cuz I knew that I had to take care of myself and, I prayed to God that the animals would be ok.

Not all of the women we interviewed had such a negative experience in finding shelter for their animals. Another woman told us that when she went to the local transition house, her partner arrived at the door to “dump off her animals” because he assumed she would bring them home and reconcile with him. He knew she would not be allowed to keep them there. However, this woman decided to take matters into her own hands and was able to find a foster home with the help of the local SPCA. She explained:

So then I wasn't going to play his silly little games, so I got on the ball and got rolling and made contacts and spoke to different people and got my animals fostered out into care in [a local animal shelter].

Not only did she find shelter for her own animals, but this animal shelter now has a policy to provide foster care for the pets of any abused woman going to the transition house for up to a month while they are making decisions about their future. This woman's own experience was extremely positive.

I went and visited them, we had visitation, and I went to see them 1 or 2 times a week and at the end of the month I got my animals back...a lovely family looked after my animals.

In another sheltering case described to us, the woman and children were not allowed to have contact with the fostering family. Still, they were pleased to know the pets were safe.

### **Summary of Pet and Animal Abuse**

Based on our findings, we strongly believe that harming or killing the animals of one's intimate partner must be viewed as a significant risk factor for abused women, both in terms of victim identification and assessment of lethality of threats. Family violence is often preceded by escalating signs of abuse and violence, and many 'red flags' have been identified that indicate victims are at risk of harm particularly when they are trying to break free from the violence (Statistics Canada, 2001). Service providers, police, and others who support abused women, should be aware of the increased risk for harm that is associated with the threats to harm or kill the family pets or farm animals and the affect that this has on women's help-seeking behaviour.

### 3.5 Experiences with Firearms

I recently had a woman who talked about how [a few months ago] her partner held a rifle to her head - threatening to blow her head off. And so, she just didn't make any moves at all. She didn't receive service or anything for months and months and months.

Another critical component of this study, in both the quantitative and qualitative data collection, has been to explore the presence of firearms, particularly long guns, in homes experiencing family violence. Given that the research was conducted in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, which are largely rural provinces, the study was able to investigate an area of family violence that has been under-researched and subsumed within mainstream urban-centric studies - that is the unique nature of firearms use and misuse in rural homes experiencing family violence. It has been well documented that homes with firearms have the highest rates of firearms deaths from homicide, suicide and accident<sup>27</sup>. In our earlier research, abused rural and farm women told us that firearms were common in rural homes and that they had played a role in the cycle of intimidation by their partners. We felt that this was a significant finding since rural homes are much more likely than urban homes to have firearms present (Hung 2000). In light of this, and the general association of the presence of firearms with increased risk of firearms lethality, we felt it was important to conduct this research on the nature and extent of firearms involvement in family violence situations in rural homes.

The findings in this section of the report are based on interviews with service providers and abused women, along with focus group discussions with a broad range of community participants. Although we were interested in firearms misuse in family violence situations, we began by exploring the presence of firearms in rural communities generally. We then asked about the presence of firearms in abusive relationships and the possible link to both the responses of the victim (including inaction or the decision to seek help or safety), and the responses of service providers and crisis interveners. Finally, we explored the nature of firearms misuse such as threats to harm a partner, commit suicide, harm children, family or property, or threats to harm or kill pets or farm animals.

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<sup>27</sup> Canadian Firearms Centre, 1998, Urban and Rural Firearms Deaths in Canada, Available on the World Wide Web: [http://www.cfc-ccaf.gc.ca/en/research/other\\_docs/notes/rural/default.asp](http://www.cfc-ccaf.gc.ca/en/research/other_docs/notes/rural/default.asp).



## **Firearms Ownership – Who has a Gun?**

Growing up, I remember seeing guns in almost every home I visited – they were hung on the walls or just lying on top of bookcases. Guns were a pretty normal thing to see in my friends' homes.

The interviewees in this study, as well as our previous studies (Hornosty and Doherty 2002), were adamant that most of the people in their rural community had firearms – or access to firearms. Some people went as far as to suggest that official statistics are a gross under-estimation of the number of firearms present in rural households. Official gun ownership statistics indicate that ownership of firearms varies considerably among the regions of Canada with the highest rates of ownership being in the Territories where 69% of households own firearms. The rates among provinces fluctuate from 14% owning at least one gun in Ontario, to 20% in Prince Edward Island, to 36% in New Brunswick (Hung 2000). Long guns are more prevalent than hand guns, especially in rural residences, though rural households account for only 20% of Canada's population (Census Canada 2006). On average, 22% of Canadian households own a firearm (Hung 2000). International comparisons show that this places Canada in mid-range of gun ownership - compared to the United States where firearms ownership is about 48% of households.

Despite such “official statistics”, there is a common belief among the rural women and service providers that we interviewed that “almost every rural home has a gun”. This belief appeared to be more prevalent in New Brunswick than in Prince Edward Island. As one interviewee said,

Everybody has a gun - everybody. Those who don't - now that's rare... I'd like to know the statistics, like, if there are 500 houses in our village, how many houses don't have guns - I'd say maybe 10 houses don't.

Another participant in a focus group explained it this way

I'm from a very rural community...we had so many firearms...a gun was the same thing as my soccer ball or as our baseball bat.”

One law enforcement officer we interviewed also felt that the official statistics do not adequately reflect the potential for police officers to encounter a firearm in a rural home

I heard the number before that fourteen percent of people in [this area] are gun owners. I think that's extremely low. I think that it's close to probably say forty percent. I'd say almost, yeah, probably forty percent.

## **Status of Firearms**

I'm going to tell you that of the 20 people that I know that have guns, 15 of them are not registered. And that's people I know.

The kinds of firearms that the participants in our survey had in their own homes, saw in other people's homes, or knew about were mostly long guns, although we did hear about handguns as well. There were a variety of different rifles and shotguns mentioned depending on the intended activities and uses which ranged from hunting rabbits, deer, moose, Canada geese, and ducks, to shooting vermin on the farm such as raccoons or foxes that got into hen house or crows that were ruining a grain crop. In New Brunswick, rural households tended to have both rifles and shotguns, and often several of each.

One's like, you know, the three-o-three for the deer, and then there's one for buck and something for birds, and that kind of thing.

In Prince Edward Island, it was explained that people mostly kept shotguns.

Ah, because a lot of people bird hunt here. And farmers are allowed to have shotguns, because, also they have crops, and they can protect them from blackbirds. So ... they have the shotguns. We know if it's a farmer. Normally he's got the plug out...the spray goes everywhere. They don't have to worry about aiming. It just scatters...that way, they can shoot more of the blackbirds.

Participants commonly believed that not all people with firearms in their rural communities obtain a license, and even those that do, do not register all of their firearms. They also felt that a great many firearms are not properly secured or stored.

There's a lot of firearms. I know one house in particular has over 6 different firearms within a child's reach – 90% of guns around here, any firearm, is not locked. Most of them the bullets are also within reach. I have yet to go into a house that has a firearm that's locked, or even has the bullets away from the gun.

One participant suggested that unsafe storage of firearms is not taken seriously by people generally, or by the Courts. He noted:

Unsafe storage is treated as a minor offence by the Courts, so charging individuals for infractions has little deterrent effect. Yet unsafe storage is so widespread, it has become an epidemic. This is based on ignorance [of the possible lethal consequences of unsafe storage] and a cavalier attitude to firearms safety.”

Several participants felt strongly that when the police do lay charges for a firearms offence, such as unsafe storage, the guns should be confiscated. That might be the only deterrent that would motivate some gun owners to properly lock up their firearms. However, when individuals are charged for unsafe storage, they typically receive a fine and their firearm is returned to them. We learned that in New Brunswick, the police seize 4,000 weapons a year – and 3,000 of them are returned to their owners<sup>28</sup>. Some participants suggested that this sends the wrong message to society as people view it as a “slap on the wrist”. It shows that unsafe firearms storage is not considered a very serious matter. Several participants felt that if these weapons were instead confiscated, it would compel people to safely store their firearms.

These assertions, that many firearms are not registered and that unsafe storage is widespread, was confirmed by our quantitative data which showed a high percentage of the guns in rural households are not registered, nor properly stored. This was associated with a greater sense of fear in homes where women are experiencing family violence. Indeed, it was felt that some gun owners actually hide firearms around the house. Several participants talked about having guns in dresser drawers, under the bed, in closets and stowed away somewhere on the property.

Handguns are hidden ... tucked away. But the bigger guns are usually on walls or in a cupboard or right, like you open the cupboard and there's a row of them, I've seen that a couple of times in the kitchen.

One focus group participant noted,

There's a lot of guns out there that we don't know about necessarily. I think there's a desensitization, too. Like, when we moved into our house... there was a rifle in the closet... like, we inherited a gun.

Similarly, a crisis worker told us about an abused woman who was often involved with the police, but she did not reveal to them that there were firearms hidden on the property.

The police were at the home many times on domestic violence calls but she never brought it to the police's attention that there were guns in the home.

One police officer used a recent domestic violence call to demonstrate how difficult it can be for police and others to know if there is a firearm in the home – even when they

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<sup>28</sup> Personal communication with the New Brunswick Chief Firearms Officer.

have checked with the gun registry. This is of particular concern he noted when police are intervening in domestic cases. He described a situation in which an elderly woman and man were fighting and the police were called. As far as he knew, there were no firearms involved or present in the home.

Anyways, and, when it was all settled three days later, she handed me his gun that he had... But, she hadn't said there was any in the house. I wouldn't have suspected they would have ever had any. And, then she becomes concerned after three days and he was two days in a hotel. And they had made arrangements he was gonna come back, and she wanted me to have his gun that they said wasn't there for the last two days. So I think maybe there's a lot of that. Maybe they are there [but] no one's saying anything [cuz they're] not registered.

This police officer explained that people's decision not to register guns had nothing to do with "illegal guns". Most were everyday rifles and shotguns – some of them antiques - that easily could have been registered, but the owners chose not to do so.

I think it's cumulative; maybe, it's just my assumption about why people wouldn't register. They don't want people to know, 'cause eventually they'll get taxed or something with it. Also sometimes, like, I got this from Joe down the road. He didn't want it anymore, so he gave me this and I gave him two of mine. So now you gotta call someone and tell them and do all the transfer papers and all that's stuff. So it's just as easy to, yeah, put it underneath the bed.

We've seen guns that come into our possession that are truly, truly, very valuable collector items...lever action kind of a gun, it was all gold plated. It was worth seven thousand dollars. And there was two of them. ....It wasn't registered and it was seized. They weren't gonna register them, they didn't have their license. And they were going to get melted because they weren't registered. Why wouldn't you register that? You know. That's the question you ask yourself.

Generally, participants in the study expressed similar opinions. One of the abused women interviewed said that firearms are not registered because:

They say it's too expensive and it's too much work and they feel that if they've had the gun before the law ... then it's their's. They don't care. So no, most of the guns around here are not registered.

Although we heard that the police and service providers will ask an abused woman about the presence of firearms, several service providers told us that women are very reluctant to tell the police or service providers about "hidden" firearms. There are several reasons for this. Service providers told us that it is a matter of trust and most women will not disclose until after two or three visits when they begin to feel a rapport with the service

provider. Another concern that silences women is the concern that the police will confiscate his firearms if she mentions them to anyone.

I think that perhaps people may be very protective of their partner as well. So even though they are in very high risk situations, they may not necessarily see that themselves. And if you were to, to say “Well, do you think that he should have had his, his firearms removed?” They may say “Well, no, because he really enjoys hunting. He does this. He does that.” So, they don't want him to suffer any negative consequences.

One crisis worker at a transition house agreed that even when they asked abused women about guns, many women chose not to disclose. Another crisis worker said that it was common for women to give them ‘misinformation on their in-take forms’ the first few times they stayed at a shelter. She commented:

I think [firearms are] a lot more prevalent than what even we know. I think that we have people who come through who perhaps don't disclose a whole lot of information about the fact that there's guns in their home, until maybe something major happens, and they have to. I've met women before who've never talked about weapons. And then, you know, here's a big incident and he's drinking and he pulls out a firearm out. So then, the police are called, and there's, you know, a big stand off in the community and... nobody was aware that he even had those weapons there.

This very common belief - that there are many guns around that are hidden or not registered - leads us to speculate that the rate of firearms ownership in rural areas is considerably higher than the official statistics indicate. Thus, when a police officer in this study estimates that 40% of the households in his community own firearms, he may be closer to the truth than official statistics. Another participant estimated that there is fairly high compliance with licensing, but probably only a 60% compliance with registration. The possibility of that some gun owners do not have a license and that some or all of the firearms in rural homes are unregistered has very real and practical implications, both for the women who are being victimized by firearms, and for the police and service providers who attempt to help them. As well, we were told that one must be careful when asking the abused woman questions about the presence of firearms in the home. She may indicate there are none in the home; but there may indeed be firearms elsewhere. For example, he may keep a couple on his fishing boat, in a hunting cabin, or in his truck. Almost all of the participants expressed concerns about the indirect intimidation that was created by the mere availability of firearms.

And I don't think it really matters whether there's a gun in the home or not - the access is there - cuz your neighbor will have one, or the best friend, or your family, or your friend's grandfather.

Although not within the scope of the current research, criminal justice officials who participated in the study, suggest that some of the firearms misuse could be seasonal. For example, one court was seeing a lot of firearms charges during hunting season.

... at least where I work out of ...which is fairly rural. I notice firearm charges on the docket a lot, and I think it has to do with hunting, and, there's just a lot - improper storage - unregistered [guns].

Police officers in the study confirmed an increase in firearms infractions during hunting seasons. This is largely because "firearms are more out in the open during hunting season" which provides police with the opportunity to check if the owner has a license and if the firearm is registered. In light of the association of hunting and drinking, along with the improper transportation of guns into the woods (loaded and lying on the floor of trucks), one might speculate that in homes experiencing family violence, there may be a heightened risk of harm during the hunting season. Just as hunting season provides the circumstances for checking on firearms, some participants felt that police should use their discretion to check on weapons more often when they are called to family violence situations.

### **When Firearms Become Weapons**

Think about it. It's a weapon, and it will always be a weapon, whether it's for hunting or something else.

In the current study, we have specifically asked women about their experiences with firearms abuse. In homes where there is a violent and controlling spouse, we were told that the firearms definitely contributed to a climate of terror. However, it was not until women began to live in an abusive relationship and experience threats of personal harm or other forms of firearms victimization, including threats to commit suicide if she left, threats to harm or kill her, the children or pets, and forced sexual activity at gunpoint, that firearms took on a different meaning. As one woman explained:

...if you wanted to get up and go to the bathroom and he was wanting to talk to you, then you had to sit there because he would have the gun in his hands and he'd put that against your head and would pull the trigger...you know...there were no bullets in it, but at the time you didn't know...you didn't know if they were in there or not.

Another woman said:

It was a loaded gun all the time... There was one time he wanted sex and I said no I didn't want to, because like I was sore from being hit so many times and he held the gun to my head that was loaded, to my head, and raped me.

Many of those interviewed felt that the fear caused by firearms does not have to involve direct threats. There is a level of terror and intimidation created by the very presence of the firearm. As one focus group participant noted:

He doesn't have to threaten to kill her, all he has to do is look over at the bed and she knows there is rifle underneath and that she had better do what he says.

A crisis worker who participated in a focus group told us that:

Sometimes firearms were kept under the seats in vehicles so that if the abused woman is going to a grocery store and tries to run, she couldn't because the gun was there.

Participants at one focus group felt that women who are terrorized by firearms are afraid to involve the police and courts because they believe that the justice system will not be able to protect them. Several abused women also told us they were to afraid to "rock the boat" because they knew that no matter what happened, their partner would have access to firearms – his grandfather's, his friend's or a neighbour's. In fact, several service providers mentioned that even when women do disclose firearms to them there is no follow up – nothing happens.

The potential presence of firearms makes it very difficult to offer protection to women experiencing violence.

No matter what the police do, if Buddy wants a firearm, he darn well is going to get one. It's hard for the police to confiscate firearms from an abusive man when they don't know about them.

This is particularly problematic in light of the finding that many rural homes have unregistered firearms. One woman told us that when her husband was arrested for assaulting her, the police searched the house and they found firearms that she did not know existed. Other participants felt that even if the police confiscate a couple of his firearms, he may have others hidden somewhere on the property. One shelter worker told us about a woman who left her abusive husband and the RCMP laid charges and confiscated all his firearms. Soon afterward, this woman heard that he was in the process of getting another one.

And about three nights ago, she found out, or her daughter found out, that he was over at the neighbors....and he was looking for a rifle. Anyways, so I mean they contacted the RCMP.

Several participants noted their concern about the ready availability of firearms; it is very difficult to ensure somebody's safety from an abusive spouse when people know that friends and family might give him a firearm.

I've had women talk about, even if there wasn't a gun in the house, talk about fear that maybe he'll get a gun ...you know that his buddies have weapons. He can very easily go to his buddy and get a weapon. You know, they know that. So it comes into play, into their thinking, when they are trying to assess risk.

I believe that if a guy wants a firearm he'll get it. It doesn't matter, and if that's what he's going to do with it (threaten his partner), he'll get it."

Women are scared to speak because you don't know what's going to happen...if you do say something. That's the only reason I never called the cops is because I knew if he had of found out I wouldn't be here today.

Some participants felt that women who are victimized with firearms learn to normalize the firearms abuse over the years to the extent that they consider it part of their every day life. Many are not even fearful because they have been threatened so often with a firearm and he has never actually pulled the trigger. With desensitization to firearms victimization, abused women may not appreciate the potential for lethality. Several service providers in the study felt that professionals who are also exposed to "the gun culture" in their communities, may themselves underestimate the risk of lethality from firearms.

...the lack of attention to the safety of abused women is partly explained by the high tolerance to firearms abuse in rural homes – even by professionals.

Of course, most service providers do react strongly when they learn of extreme firearms abuse. One abused woman told us that when she was going to a counsellor for her depression, she disclosed that her spouse often held a rifle to her head. The counsellor told her that she was at great risk of "becoming a statistic". It was only then that she became fearful. In discussing women's apparent lack of concern for their safety in the face of firearms victimization, it was pointed out that most abused women are all too aware that the situation could turn deadly. Their response, which may include not reporting the abuse or the firearms, may be a "strategy" adopted for staying safe, rather than a lack of awareness of the risk. In some instances, women do make attempts to have firearms removed from their homes.



Some participants felt that there should be a stronger reaction to firearms misuse in homes or while out hunting. Many felt that the courts only give men a “slap on the wrist” for improper storage or misuse of their firearm. One participant pointed to the recent conviction of a Nova Scotia man for shooting at a robotic moose<sup>29</sup>. He was fined, his car and his rifle seized, and he cannot hunt for twenty years. While moose are an endangered species in Nova Scotia, this person argued that the Courts can and should take firearms misuse in family situations more seriously and impose equally serious penalties. Another participant argued that “surely the life of a woman, child, or pet, is at least as important as a robotic moose”. Participants noted that confiscation and restrictions on firearms would act as a deterrent that might compel gun owners to properly lock their firearms – and this would definitely save lives. As a caveat, one participant added that if firearms are removed, “the police should check every few months because it is easy to get another gun around here”.

### **Suicide and Alcohol/Drug Abuse in relation to Firearms**

Other factors that participants in our study noted in relation to firearms misuse were threats to commit suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, and the abuse of family pets and farm animals. These factors were thought to generate greater risk when coupled with firearms victimization, particularly at times of high stress in the family such as unemployment. One crisis worker knew of women who had the police remove firearms to prevent a partner from committing suicide.

I've actually had clients who have [been afraid of firearms] – that's what led us to call the police for help. It's not help to leave the relationship [they want]; its help to get the guns out of the house, to remove his ability to kill himself, or to use that method... We've seen that in a few cases, where they call and say that he has guns in the house, and then that kind of opens up the can of worms.

Participants generally expressed concern for the added risks associated with depression and other mental health problems. One woman we interviewed told us that her abusive partner never threatened her with his many unregistered firearms (long guns and

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<sup>29</sup> Times & Transcript | Atlantic Canada, *Hunter banned for shooting robotic moose*, As published on page A1/A8 on March 29, 2006

handguns) that he kept loaded in his underwear drawer, but that when the verbal and emotional abuse became intolerable, she once told him to kill her.

I grabbed the [gun] and put it on my head - told him this is how far this is going...I want to die...

One crisis worker felt that, from her experiences as a professional, the potential for domestic violence to escalate could also be attributed to a rise in drug use.

Also, too, there's more and more drugs, and more and more pills, like Percocet and it's not just in towns... so even someone is living way out in the middle of no where [he] has access to purchase Percocet...or Advan, or other medications. Like, that's very big, and the partners ... the woman keeps very close tabs on how their partner's mental health is. If they're using heavily right now, if they're not using heavily. They're always gauging their mental health, because sometimes it tends to go up and down. So that plays a major factor.

Another service provider explained that she felt “mental health” problems in combination with alcohol and/or drug abuse were two factors that she looked for when accessing risk. If firearms were present, she worried even more about the potential for the situation to become dangerous.

When there's mental health problems or drinking, and as drinking progresses, what's he gonna do with the firearm? He may not start off by threatening, but just the fact that it's there [a gun], and there's alcohol....

My boyfriend's an alcoholic and we've had a gun in the basement, and my children were fearful for me. He never threatened me but he threatened himself, every time he'd be drinking. And I hid it for along while, and then I spoke to one of the RCMP officers and he said just, wrap it up and bring it in and we'll destroy it for you. And that's exactly what I did so that I don't have to worry about him having the gun in the basement anymore, or using it on himself or me.

We heard repeatedly of women who were reluctant to leave an abusive relationship because of their partners' threats to commit suicide - “If you leave, I'll kill myself”. Suicide threats place women in a dilemma. This man that they want to leave might be the father of their children, well-liked in the community, and someone they still have feelings for. If a woman leaves an abusive relationship and her partner kills himself, there is a strong, often realistic, belief that people will blame her. One service provider said that such threats by abusers become powerful tools of control. She described a couple of cases where abusive men had “attempted” suicide so that the woman would not leave.

Men would often shoot themselves in non fatal areas: threatening suicide, to try and prevent the abused woman from leaving.

In other cases, the suicide attempts were in earnest.

He was seventeen and he blew his head off over his girlfriend...I guess that's not domestic<sup>30</sup> – He had her on the phone at the time. She heard the pop.

Sometimes women have listened to suicide threat so many times, that when they do leave, they don't expect him to carry through. However, one abused woman told us that when she finally called the police for the first time and they pressed charges, her abusive partner committed suicide within five hours. She felt guilty, but she also noted, if he had not killed himself, he probably would have killed her eventually. A police officer told us that “we had one there where buddy called and said ‘If you're not coming back, I'm gonna kill myself.’ The spouse did not return and he did kill himself.” Again, those in the focus group expressed the sentiment that if the woman had returned, it might have been a murder-suicide rather than a suicide.

Nationally, 39% of male ex-partners in spousal homicides committed suicide after killing the victim, while 6% attempted suicide (Aucoin, 2005). A New Brunswick study of domestic homicide over the past 15 years found that all but one of the nine murder-suicides involved a man killing his partner with a firearm and turning it on himself (Doherty 2006). The fact that separation is a particularly dangerous time for spousal homicide is well documented (Canadian Department of Justice, 2005; Campbell et al., 2003). Although not all homicides and murder-suicides occur with a firearm, one participant shared this comment about the availability of firearms in rural homes:

The other issue that I wanted to comment on was all the homicides. I mean, a lot of them occur because it was easy access [to firearms]. These men would not have killed their wives if they needed to strangle them, but a gun was easy to do, and then to put it on themselves.

Many abused women said that they did not know where to turn for help when their partner was threatening suicide. One woman told us she did not know who to trust. In her case, she had moved from another province and she felt extremely isolated.

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<sup>30</sup> The comment above – its not a domestic – demonstrates how little understood the concept of family violence sometimes is. Although this police officer had dealt with hundreds of domestic calls, he did not consider conflict between intimate partners outside of marriage to be family violence. In another jurisdiction, a police officer told us that he had been instructed to regard any current or ex-intimate relationship, of any duration, including boyfriend/girlfriend, as a domestic call – as family violence.

I'm saying this from personal experience...the relationship did end in suicide. But I think at that time, the fear that I was experiencing...was walking on eggshells. Wanting to tell somebody, wanting to, you know, reach out and ask for that help, but also being really afraid of the consequences, that if I mentioned anything, what would that mean? I think they don't know who to trust.

Participants in the study were generally unaware that there was a toll-free number to report firearms abuse to the Canada Firearms Centre. Moreover, the role of spouses/partners during the firearms application process was not well understood. Currently when a person applies for a firearms license, Application for a Possession and Acquisition Licence Under the *Firearms Act* (For Individuals Aged 18 and Over), or fills out an Application for Renewal of a Firearms Licence for an Individual, in Section D and E – “Information About Current And Former Conjugal Partners”, the applicant must provide the name, address, telephone number, and date of birth, of every spouse, common law partner, or all other persons with whom he or she lives or has have lived with within the last 2 years.<sup>31</sup> This allows women to share their concerns if they believe their partner/former partner should not have access to firearms. Clearly, being threatened with a firearm, or having concerns that one's partner may commit suicide, could result in further investigation and a determination not to issue the firearms license. However, most participants in the study indicated that women would not oppose the application knowing that this would make their partner extremely angry – and perhaps lead to further violence. Instead of relying on abused women to report concerns during the application process, it was suggested that when the Firearms Office had cause to investigate an applicant or licensee, that they use this opportunity to ask the partner a series of questions about direct and indirect firearm's victimization, destruction of property, concerns about suicide and threats to harm pets. Rather than expecting a man's partner, especially a current partner, to speak out about abuse or share concerns about their partner's stability at the time of application, it may be more likely that important information could be obtained during an investigation that was triggered for other reasons.

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<sup>31</sup> There are then two options for partners to have input during the application process. One is to sign the signature block on their partner's application form under a message stating “IF YOU HAVE ANY SAFETY CONCERNS ABOUT THIS APPLICATION, PLEASE CALL 1 800 731-4000”. If the applicant has included their partner's name on the application and the partner has not signed, the Chief Firearms Officer has a duty to notify them of the application for a firearms license.

Several people suggested the enactment of provincial legislation that would ensure that doctors and mental health officials have a legal obligation to report to the Firearms Office any concerns that come to their attention when they learn that somebody is suicidal and has access to firearms. This should trigger the automatic removal of the firearms<sup>32</sup>. If such a law was in place, then abused women would have somewhere to turn – they could talk to their family doctor or healthcare practitioner and share their concerns. Part of the dilemma that women face when confronted with suicide threats is that they blame themselves and feel guilty. Creating a link to the healthcare system would offer an important opportunity to counsel women leaving abusive relationships and empower them to understand that they are not responsible for the partner’s actions. One abused woman spoke of the importance of self-esteem and empowerment:

I put up with his threats for a long time. I can remember, like, a year afterwards, we hadn’t been together for almost a year and he called me one night, and he said, “You know, I can’t do this blah, blah, blah. I hope you realize that, if I end my life, it’s because of you.” And I said, “No, it’s because of the choices you made,” and I had to just say, “You know what? I’m no longer carrying that guilt for you. Like, you know, yes, it’ll hurt me, and yes, it’ll be hard to explain to the kids, but, that’s your responsibility.”

Similarly, another abused woman who lived for many years with threats of suicide described her feeling of elation after leaving the relationship when she realized she was not responsible for his state of mind. She realized that no matter what she did, it would never be enough - she could never make him happy.

Now that I’m out of it, it’s wonderful. You rise to the challenge. I just wanted to fix things. I wanted to get him happy, and it was impossible. And I kept saying that to him, and he just couldn’t get happy. You go on...because of his alcoholism, I understand that. I’m still frustrated by it.

When abused women do ask for help because of suicide threats, it is not always forthcoming. One abused woman spoke of turning to the police for help. She asked the

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<sup>32</sup> In a 2005 study, the Canadian Paediatric Society recommended that firearms in homes or environments in which children and adolescents live and play should not have firearms. But, if they are present, they recommended “guns be stored according to the regulations of the Canadian Firearms Act, that is, unloaded, locked and separate from its ammunition” because a significant number of deaths could have been prevented by limited access to firearms in the first place. Youth and Firearms in Canada *Paediatrics & Child Health* 2005; 10(8): 473-477 Reference No. AH05-02, <http://www.cps.ca/English/statements/AM/AH05-02.htm>

police to detain her partner who was extremely violent and suicidal – for his own good. The woman told the police that she feared for her life and that he might kill himself. The police told her that they would not be able to put him in jail. Instead, the officer asked her to let him come back home. She told us:

...no they're not gonna keep him here. I said, yes, they should keep him there. For one thing, he's suicidal, that's one thing that I had to fight with them with. But [my husband] was like a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and he was working on the good side with this man. He had this man [the police officer] turned around after 25 minutes in the back of the car. [The officer says] well, he's gonna have no where's to go.

Stories about the terror and intimidation that women experience when their partners threaten to harm them, their children, family members or pets were pervasive in this study. The presence of firearms made those threats more menacing.

He found it amusing. He let the dog play with a loaded gun with no safety on it. And he said 'oh if the dog shoots himself it's not my fault'. I mean why else would you give a dog a loaded gun with no safety.

When participants in the focus groups were asked what they thought an abusive man meant when he said to his partner "if you leave I will kill you, or the children or the pets". How would he kill them? We typically got this response:

I think, well, I've never really thought about it. I just, I just assumed a gun - probably because he has a gun - cuz the reality is, it's a lot harder to strangle the pet, whatever.

But if it's a gun, you pull the trigger. It's so easy and there is no time for confrontation or to back off. It's just you pull the trigger. Well, you cock the gun, pull the trigger, and that's, that's it. But it can happen so quickly.

Yeah, yeah, yup. Like I don't think it necessarily lessens [the fear] if they're threatening to kill you or to kill something, you know that they can do it, because they'll get it somewhere.

### **Summary – Experiences with Firearms**

The lack of attention to the safety of abused women is partly explained by the high tolerance to firearms abuse in rural homes – even by professionals.

Although we must exercise caution in extrapolating lethality risk based solely on the association of firearms misuse in the intimidation and control of women in domestic situations, the strong correlation between the highest firearms ownership rates and the highest rates of firearms deaths from homicide, suicide and accident is well documented (Gabor et al.; Hung, 2000; Mcfarlane et al., 1998; Saltzman et al., 1992; Woodbridge, nd).

The prevalence of firearms in rural homes generally, along with the cavalier attitude towards safe storage and their association with control and intimidation in homes experiencing family violence, is undeniable. Yet, the “gun culture” in rural communities has never really been recognized as a factor that must be considered in assessing risk given its role in creating a lack of attention to women’s safety and an under-estimation of potential risk.

### 3.6 Experiences Dealing With the Police

In our earlier research with abused women in farm and rural communities, we discovered that women's experiences with the police and the legal system ranged considerably - from positive to extremely negative. We discovered this same range of experience in the current study. A few women had positive encounters, while many felt that the police had blamed them for the "fight", supported the abuser, or did not care what happened to them. Since we heard from service providers and police in the study, it is safe to say that they too reported inconsistent responses to domestic violence calls, including different reactions when firearms were present. Clearly this inconsistent response to domestic violence situations is something that needs to be addressed – particularly when it is associated with negative experiences and outcomes for victims.

Often the police represent the front line response when abused women are faced with a violent or crisis situation. The volatility of domestic cases and the potential for situations to turn deadly for all parties involved is well recognized in research and by the police (Astbury, 2000). The police involved in this study described domestic calls as the most dangerous and least liked by police officers because of the likelihood that an angry, drunk perpetrator might shoot at them. As one officer explained:

A lot of officers will say that the domestic call is one of the most difficult to handle. I think it has its complexities that is not as simple as... let's say your bar fight, okay? A bar fight is volatile because obviously people are under the influence and there maybe, traditionally just a personality conflict of some nature that has led to, y'know, fisticuffs... and separating the two individuals usually suffices...and then it becomes a process of law, of laying charges and it's simple... But in a domestic, it takes a lot more, energy, resources and thought. And first off, it's potential for what might happen on route to the call...is there firearms involved? Because those people will ... be in contact with each other for the rest of their life...I might interrupt it for the next ten minutes, or two hours or maybe two weeks while we're doing our investigation. So knowing that and going there it's sometimes you're the pawn, y'know, as an investigator. It's, yeah, it is more complex, but at the same time, you go in with the attitude of knowing what you have to do on your job...[you] watch your back a little bit more. A lot of officers have been killed in domestic violence situations.

The first thing that the police do when they respond to a domestic violence call is to check for weapons. A RCMP officer commented:

The homes we've entered, the first thing we ask is that a check is done, is there any firearms in the house. We always ask the victim. And we generally get a straight answer, yes or no. And if it's yes, what type? Mostly, it's shotguns because a lot of people bird hunt.



Another police officer described a similar process.

Our dispatch will always ask if there's a firearm...is there any weapons involved. And then they'll specifically ask "Is there a gun or firearm in the house?" They'll say a firearm, then they'll say a gun. And that information is conveyed to us...So...while we're going there, we're querying to see if the individuals, the residence, or the people associated with the residence, are what we call FIP [firearm interest person] files. So that could be a matter of seconds, or it could be minutes. That's the precautions that we'll take.

However, according to many of the other participants in the study, "getting a straight answer" about firearms from the victim, may not be reliable. Not only have we learned in this study that many people do not obtain a license and there may be a significant number of unregistered firearms in rural homes, we also learned that abused women sometimes feel safer not mentioning that their partner has access to firearms. One crisis worker told us about a client who was fearful of the firearms in her home, however:

...the police were at the home many times on domestic violence calls but she never brought it to the police's attention that there were guns in the home.

Similarly, an abused woman being interviewed confirmed the fact that women may not disclose to the police that there are firearms in the home. Although she may actually prefer to have the police remove the guns, there is a profound fear that calling the police would "kind of open up the can of worms". In fact, many of the service providers we interviewed explained that the only way that abused women will open up to them, is if the women can trust them as "safe-keepers" of information.

and if they did open up and say that there was a weapon or there were threats made, can they really trust that person to be a safe-keeper that they can entrust that information to and that something will be done about it, or is that person going to find out that they tattled - and their nightmare escalates a lot more.

Indeed, participants in this study, which included crisis workers from various transition houses and those who worked with women on an outreach basis, confirmed that only a small portion of their clients call the police. However, for some women, police intervention is a useful strategy for dealing with an immediate crisis. Most women are hesitant to move deeper into the criminal justice system and they feel that disclosing the presence of firearms could start a process over which they would have no control, such as charges under Section 86 of the *Criminal Code* for careless use or unsafe storage firearms. One police officer confirmed that if the abused woman says that she has been threatened

with a firearm, disclosure may indeed lead to charges – though not necessarily relating to the domestic violence:

... we'll check to see if they're stored safely. If they're not stored safely, we'll actually charge him with unsafe storage. And then what'll happen is he will get prohibited from having firearms and we destroy them. If it wasn't registered – that leads to charges, too. And then how did you come across it? Where was it stored? So who's gonna get charged with unsafe storage? And is there ammunition in it? That's another thing involved with it too. Yeah, it opens a door to a lot more that happens than just taking the gun out of the house for a while.

Women seem to know that if they do not cooperate with the police after a domestic call, there may not be any charges. The police need evidence that a crime has been committed and victims often refuse to make statements. However, the consequence of telling the police about their partner's firearms creates a strong possibility of multiple firearms charges, removal, and perhaps confiscation of the firearms - something that may greatly upset their partners and put these women at even greater risk. Despite police efforts to remove firearms, there seems to be a perception that there is really very little that the police can do to protect an abused woman. Many women are afraid that after an initial police intervention, their risk of harm will increase. Service providers told us, that disclosure of firearms must be done with great caution.

They either go in and they make sure there are no weapons and take care of that, or just leave it alone and let the woman cope the way she's been coping, rather than, doing some sort of half-way intervention that leaves her more at risk.

One abused woman explained,

Women are scared to speak because you don't know what's going to happen...if you do say something. That's the only reason I never called the cops is because I knew if he had of found out I wouldn't be here today.

One person suggested that people have lost faith in the judicial process because if the police are involved, and remove the firearms, it is likely that the Courts will just return them. Keep in mind that many of the infractions that these men are charged with, such as failure to obtain a license or to register their firearms, are administrative matters; once he complies, the firearms may be returned. At the same time, there may never be charges relating to the domestic violence that brought the police to the home in the first place – and thus no reason for the Firearms Office not to allow him to register.

Even if there are no guns in the home, everyone agrees that an abusive man would still have access to them. This serves to undermine women's resolve to tell the police. Many women who are fearful of their partner seem to have few options to address their safety. One outreach worker said that some of her clients would decide not to go to a transition house because it was a temporary solution.

Even the transition house, you're only there for so long... If, I've talked with women who've had the threat, and they don't leave because he's gonna find me. It doesn't matter where I go. And he said he will. And he'll kill me when he finds me.

Several of the participants described positive experiences with the police. However, rather than viewing this as the norm, they attributed it to happen-stance – to the fact that they were “lucky” enough to “get a terrific RCMP officer” as opposed to another time when the officer “seemed to be blaming me.” One woman explained that she had several bad experiences with police in the past because they made “me feel like it was almost my fault.” She explained:

I lucked out with the officer I got. If it hadn't' been for that particular officer and his manner with me, if it had been another officer...I never could have gotten it all out, because you just clam up, but he was very good. If it hadn't been for him, I couldn't have made the statements that I did.... But I didn't even tell him everything that happened.

The attributes of the officers that women felt fortunate to have on their case, included a compassionate caring attitude, a willingness to listen and to find out what she thought would help ensure her safety, and somebody who would later return her calls when she was trying to find out the status of the case. Keeping safe is a major concern of abused women who have called the police. In Prince Edward Island, where emergency protection orders are possible, several women and service providers suggested that such orders do contribute to victims' feelings of safety. One abused women told us that:

And, then, they took him out and were taking my statements down. They put him in jail over night and they said they could only keep him 24 hours, and they put me under protection, and what that does is .... that he can't contact me, it buys me time, which is good.

Because of isolation and geographic distances, we heard that another significant concern of rural women is police response time. How long will it take the RCMP to arrive during a violent confrontation? One rural woman who called the police told us she was

very pleased with the response of the police and their aggressive command of the situation when they arrived.

..so it takes a while. It probably took 20 minutes to a half hour. My front door, we never use it, it's like ornamental, I have antiques in front of it, and they came busting through that door...storming in...But, I loved how they handled it. They're very well educated. They immediately took over, but not negatively. Just said, 'oh I see what you've done here, did you break that TV?' They could see that it was smashed, really, really smashed. We took the digital camera afterwards, and took pictures of everything. He also destroyed a room back here, and we took pictures of the television, and the bruising on my arm.

A number of service providers felt that police response time to domestic calls tends to diminish if they are called to the same house repeatedly. Although this is something that could happen in either rural or urban homes; in a rural area the much longer waiting period could turn deadly. Everyone agreed that if the woman says that there are weapons involved, the response is quicker.

If the woman has called, many times, sometimes the RCMP will not go there at all... If there's firearms - if she says there's firearms -, they'll be there quicker, but there may be the whole police force out, or the whole RCMP.

Although the response is much faster when a woman tells the police that there are firearms in the house, service providers explained to us that women are often reluctant to disclose. If the entire police force (which might mean three cars in small communities) arrives, it is embarrassing and it could result in standoff for hours. This, in turn could actually escalate the situation and increase her danger.

Police who were interviewed confirmed that when weapons, particularly firearms, are known to be present, the response level and tactics increase 'several notches'. One officer told us of a case where the abusive spouse barricaded himself in the home, so "we called out the special tactical team".

...once in a domestic where a gun was used...they [dispatch] heard the shots over the phone as she called. They had the fight, he threw her around, smashed the furniture, then he went and got the gun. And that was his show. That was his power, y'know? Boom, and well, of course, she's scared, she thinks "Well I'm gonna die." We got him, and we got her out of the house.

When asked what kinds of domestic abuse situations would create the conditions for a police officer to search for or confiscate firearms, or to contact the provincial firearms officer about revoking a license, we learned that police responses vary. In some places, we

were told that just because police go to a home where a couple is “arguing” it does not mean the automatic removal of firearms.

You know if it’s an argument, one thing, and the neighbours call and they’re arguing? I mean, sometimes it takes two to tango, right? No, I won’t be revoking, but you have to do an assessment on what that might be.

The removal of firearms is linked very closely to victim fear and disclosure.

If the victim told me she was fearful, number one. If it was a violent encounter... if it involves violence, I’ll be asking for it.... So, yeah, if the person was obviously fearful, I would seek that avenue [removing the guns].

Another police officer explained the policy in his jurisdiction:

We always, like, we’ll take them for safekeeping - even if they’re registered and everything. We’ll hold on to them for the cool down period. And if it’s for the EPO, we’ll hang on to them for the ninety days, and afterwards, we’ll deal with it. We’ll talk to the owner and say, okay, here’s the situation.

In one focus group, a police officer noted that, “we really don’t run into a lot of firearms cases”. He estimated that about ten percent of domestic cases in his jurisdiction involved firearms. In these cases, there were generally charges and/or emergency protection orders.

If we’re going in there for an EPO, it means that she is in trouble. She’s been assaulted, or there’s been a history of it...so charges are gonna be laid, so we’ll keep the guns. We’d never let them stay.

Generally, the police we spoke to in the study did not hold the same perception as the majority of people with respect to estimation of the number of unregistered firearms in homes and their misuse in domestic cases. One police officer said that he felt there was 90% compliance in licensing long guns. He spoke of the value of the gun registry in helping police know if there were firearms present in a home because they knew what they were heading in to. Yet, others participating in the study felt that the “registered” firearms were only the tip of the iceberg in relation to the number of firearms in homes that were not registered.

In Prince Edward Island, where provincial legislation provides for Emergency Protection Orders, judges are able to impose a firearms prohibition as one of the conditions. However, one participant noted that in her estimation, in 8 out of 10 spousal abuse cases the judge does not order any firearms restrictions. She suggested that this must reflect the fact that when women are asked if they are fearful, they say no.

So they must not have a concern in those cases. But the ones where the charges are laid, they obviously do. Oh, a lot, a lot of disputes [are handled] by ‘stay away’, and in the stay away they can ask, “Is there a need for firearms prohibition?” And a lot of times they say no. They'd be more minor in comparison to some of the others ‘cuz if it was that major, it shouldn't go by a stay away.

For many, this is a critical flaw in the system. It has been suggested that placing the onus on abused women to disclose firearms and reveal their fear, is a burden that should not be placed on their shoulders. Pro-charge and arrest policies in both provinces have for many years taken the decision to arrest out of the hands of the victim. Charges are laid in domestic cases where the police have reasonable grounds to believe that an offence has occurred. On the other hand, and despite over 15 years of pro-charge policies, it is well documented across Canada that abused women are often reluctant participants in the criminal justice system<sup>33</sup>.

It seems that many women would rather keep quiet about firearms than deal with the consequences of reporting them. In light of this, those we interviewed agreed that we must do more to encourage women who are fearful to be more trusting that the police will take the guns out of the home if an abused woman discloses her fear of the firearms – and keep them out. Instilling this level of confidence is not as straight forward as it may appear. An abusive partner may never have directly threatened her so when the police or crisis worker asks if she has been threatened, she may say no. It may be difficult to explain how “indirect fear” operates. Because she is hesitant to say that she is fearful, the fact that she has mentioned the presence of firearms may not provide grounds for removal – unless of course they are unregistered or improperly stored – all of which would increase her own reluctance to tell. And if he does not have firearms in the home, he may have access to them elsewhere. Obviously the police cannot confiscate firearms from her partner’s grandfather, neighbours and friends homes.

Another issue that was frequently discussed was the fact that men who are charged with domestic assaults are generally back in the community within hours. Although the police do arrest men on domestic violence calls, unless it was a violent assault, they most often do not keep them in jail, or if they do it is only for 24 hours while they sober up. In

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<sup>33</sup> Brown, T. Charging and Prosecution Policies in Cases of Spousal Assault: A synthesis of research, academic, and judicial responses, Rr2001-5e, Justice Canada (2000).

rural areas, women do not live close to transition houses, and if she has children or if there are farm animals or pets to care for, the women may have few options to plan for their 'personal safety' when he is released. Several women told us they were quite fearful of what would happen when their partner returned home. One woman who had gone to the police station to report an assault said she was afraid to go home because she felt that he had gone back there. The office told her it should be safe because:

...we phoned about four times and there's no answer. I said, he's there and he's waiting for me. It felt like I was just pulling tooth and nail...I know he was doing his job, but I felt like he was on the other side, and he just didn't want to deal with it. But [my partner] was there and he was waiting for me.

Several women felt that after the initial assistance of the police during the crisis, the level of support dwindled. As one woman explained, "they were really, really great when the first thing happened, but after that, it went down hill".

He was calling me and I didn't talk to him...I wouldn't answer...I have caller ID...so I'd talk to the police officer, you know, he's been calling me, so his first reply was, 'why don't you change your phone number?'

When this woman told the police that her partner was breaking the conditions of the emergency protection order by trying to contact her, the police had suggested that she change her phone number – which she refused to do. She claims that when she continued to complain to the police that her partner was calling her, the police seemed to be upset with her. "You know he almost got mad at me 'cuz I wouldn't change my phone number."

She felt that some of this response could be attributed to the fact that the officer who "had her case" was the not the same one who came the night of the assault. This was a common experience – dealing with different people throughout the legal process. So, despite a very positive experience during the time of crisis, this woman's contact with the police deteriorated as time went on. In her estimation, the more she asked for help, the less responsive the police became. She noted, "...they just got sick and tired of the whole thing." Although she had taken pictures of the caller ID and used the telephone tracing service to prove the caller was her ex-partner harassing her in the middle of the night, when the police contacted him to ask about it, "he denied it all".

A few of the participants complained about police follow up on protective orders. Again, they felt that the police were helpful during the initial violent episode, but they were not as attentive when it came to following up. This was especially evident when their

partners started breaking the orders by “calling” or “hanging out near the house” or “sending a valentine card”. Another woman we heard about who was under a protective order called the police to say that her ex-partner had been stalking her and lurking around her house. She claims that the police responded, “...well, boys will be boys”. Another woman, whose on-going contact with the police had turned negative and stressful, explained that she found help from Victim Services.

...like there's a victim's services here, which is wonderful, they have been really, really great. I've marveled at the help.

Eventually, when the police did not do anything about the phone calls from her partner, she told her victim service worker. This information was then shared with a Crown prosecutor who checked into it and discovered that her partner was indeed calling her.

One abused woman explained that her partner, who had been excluded from the home on an emergency protection order, called the police and asked them to get his jeep back. He had had lost his license, and the jeep was the only means of transportation that his wife had. The police called her to say that her partner “wants his jeep back.” She refused.

I was proud of myself because normally I say, oh ok. But I said, I really don't think that's your decision. I think that's the court's decision, because that's my only method of transportation right now, and he doesn't drive. I said, he's only taking it to hurt me, and it'll be sitting in his front yard. And, so the police said, ok I get it...it's a marital asset.

On the other hand, police in the study spoke of their frustration when victims initiate contact and break the no-contact orders - something police felt was a common occurrence. Fortunately, the involvement of victim services workers in some of these cases appeared to result in more positive experiences. One woman explained that although she found the entire process of dealing with the police and waiting to go to court extremely frustrating, it was less so because of the help of victim services.

I wasn't frustrated from the people I got help. I think my victim services girl, I just lucked into a really good person, I think the stars were shining on me there, just like I got a really good police officer.

Several women who had negative experiences with the police reported that they were upset because the police did not seem to “take the situation seriously”. One young woman who wanted her “boyfriend removed from the apartment” called the police, but claims that they would not come to the house”.



They (the police) wouldn't provide transportation, they wouldn't do nothing. So I got one of my family workers to take me to the police station to file the police report and they acted as if I was the one that did something wrong. I didn't have nothing I needed and I wasn't even allowed back in my apartment to get things. The police wouldn't even get the stuff I needed, like formula for my child. Or baby food or diapers or, they would not do anything.

Other times, we heard that women were frightened or embarrassed to call the police because so many people in rural communities have "scanners" in order to listen to the 'comings and goings' of the police. This is common in both provinces.

A lot of times women will not call, because they know their call is gonna be picked up...that's how terrified they are of their husband or their partner, that he's gonna hear. Because a lot of times, it will be, buddy down the road has got a scanner, and he has told the husband.

A police officer in the study told us that:

We get certain calls to a certain area - we don't say anything on the air because every one of them have scanners, and they're cleaning up the place before we get there. It's miraculous, everyone is gone...

A social worker commented on the affect scanners have on people's sense of privacy.

I mean, I've heard facts get back to me in my community about a situation that I know through work, and they're absolutely, one-hundred percent correct. And you're like; they already heard it on the scanner. And you're thinking, oh my - I mean, in terms of privacy, like, they'll say "The RCMP were at so-and-so's house today and..."

To counteract this, one crisis worker told us:

..when I phone the RCMP, I'll always say, "I do not want to speak to you until you're on a phone"- because it's their car phones and their scanners pick that up you know. So they'll have to go to a phone before I'll mention a name. And I tell women too...make sure that when you're talking to the RCMP that they are on a regular phone. You know, if it's not a, a crisis right then.

As a result of scanners and neighbourhood gossip, many participants commented that having the police come to your house is a traumatic event for many women.

...just having the police go to give her a subpoena was a really difficult for her. She didn't want the police car in the yard because she knew the neighbors would see. I had to go get her, bring here so the police could come because it was traumatic for her that the community would know that the police were involved. So that's why, my feelings anyway, is that it's a lot more difficult for women in rural areas to disclose than in urban community.

Participants agreed that a significant reason that abused women are afraid to call the police is because of retaliation from the partner and/or his family. However, police and others in this study reported that when women did involve the police, their partners reacted in various ways. One woman told us that when her partner got out of jail after 24 hours,

...he never spoke to me for 3 days after that, because I set the police on him. I didn't set the police on him he did it to himself.

Another service provider noted that the responses of abusive men who have been confronted by the police are quite varied – and unpredictable. She has seen abusive men who have become “weepy and regretful” after being arrested; men who are angry and belligerent; and men who appear indifferent to having been arrested for domestic assault.

## **SECTION 4 – PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE**

### **4.1 A Thematic Content Analysis of Newspaper Articles**

An element of our broader research project on domestic violence was to conduct a thematic content analysis of various newspaper articles on this topic. In conjunction with the other aspects of this project, a media analysis allowed us to look at the ways in which domestic violence is reported, particularly when links with firearms are made. The purpose of the media analysis is to compare the findings to those that have emerged in the quantitative and qualitative sections of this report, and in the case law review. Our goal is to determine to what extent the media reflects the social and cultural norms around family violence that we have identified in interviewing women and conducting focus groups. In other words: Does gender stereotyping of women appear? Does the “firearms culture” emerge? Are abusers absolved of their violence because of addictions or mental health problems? Is the victim blamed? What is the attitude to firearms abuse? In what context does the abuse of animals get reported? Our analysis attempts to demonstrate that the ways in which the media portrays family violence, its causes, and the solutions, are in fact quite similar to the broader social and cultural norms that affect how rural women experience and respond to abuse,

In this section of the report we will provide an overview of how we conducted the media analysis, as well as the various themes that emerged from examining the selected articles. There are some themes that appeared more than others through the course of this analysis; however, each of the themes identified contributes to our understanding of domestic violence, how it is commonly portrayed in the media and what can be or is being done to mitigate the instances of domestic violence in the lives of those who experience it.

#### **Methods – What is Content Analysis and How was it Conducted?**

As noted above, the goal of conducting a media analysis is to gain an understanding about how the issue of domestic violence is dealt with in popular media. The first task was to search and locate various newspaper articles that deal with incidents of domestic

violence.<sup>34</sup> Once the articles were collected, the next task was to read, review and code the various themes that emerged from these articles. Finally, we analyzed the prominent content of these articles in order to better understand how domestic violence is commonly portrayed in the news media. To explain this process in more detail we first explore the nature of content analysis, some of the ways it is used in the social sciences, and why it is an appropriate component for this particular research project.

Content analysis is a method of research that involves the methodical investigation and analysis of static documents or texts. It is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004). This enables researchers to consider static documents such as newspapers, magazines, personal diaries, or even political speeches. Conducting a content analysis entails “a systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter” (Krippendorff, 2004). It is through this process that the researcher makes sense of what is going on in the text and how this is relevant to the broader societal context as well as their particular research question.

While some authors (Neuendorf, 2002; Weber, 1990) contend that content analysis is predominantly or even exclusively a quantitative enterprise, others do not (Krippendorff, 2004; Mayring, 2000), and we do not use that approach in this analysis. While the content of texts is often analyzed in terms of its quantitative properties, we felt that the goals of this research fit most appropriately with a thematic content analysis. While frequencies of words and phrases are not entirely irrelevant to this study, we are most interested in the themes that emerged from a reading of the articles. Krippendorff (2004) argues that, “reading is fundamentally a qualitative process, even when it results in numerical accounts.” We found it more appropriate and valuable to take a qualitative approach to conducting our analysis.

The thematic content analysis was done in three main stages. First, articles were searched out and selected based on their correlation to the issue of domestic abuse or firearm violence. Newspaper articles were selected for our analysis due to the relative facility of collection, as well as the (way in which newspaper articles reflect the views of the author, the editors, or the broader society in which it exists) not sure what this means??.

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<sup>34</sup> For a complete list of these articles, please see Appendix W.

Many online databases were searched, and hundreds of articles were perused, and approximately 130 articles were selected for analysis. While the focus was primarily on Maritime papers, we also included articles from the Globe and Mail and the CBC to find articles that have national significance. The main search engines used were the UNB E-newspaper database and the Canadacast search engine, for the Maritime papers, as well as the Globe and Mail and CBC websites to locate national stories. Articles were found based on a search of the following terms: family violence, domestic violence, spousal assault, sexual assault, uttering threats, manslaughter, murder, peace bond, restraining order, spousal abuse, firearms, gun, rifle, weapon, animal abuse and pet abuse. A sub-search was conducted from the results of the preliminary search to link these words with instances of domestic violence against women. This sub-search included words such as “girlfriend,” “spouse,” and “common-law partner.”

The next two stages of the content analysis were done concurrently in order to achieve results that accurately reflect the content of the articles. Once we compiled all of the articles, we began the second stage of the content analysis, which required that the selected articles be reviewed through reading, re-reading, highlighting and comparing to other articles. This process allowed us to create a thematic code by which to categorize and analyze the content of the articles (See Appendix X). This code was developed in conjunction with the themes that had previously emerged from the surveys and interviews, as well as with an open mind about the potential for the emergence of new themes that were not discussed in other areas of the project. When important issues were discussed in an article, they were segmented into the appropriate category.

From a preliminary understanding of the content inherent in these articles, a third stage was necessary, and that was the analysis of the themes that emerged from the data in stage two. Once the content of the articles was coded into appropriate categories, different sub-themes were indicated according to their relevance to the goals of the research and their reflection of the general content of the articles. The coded document was printed off and then sub-themes were highlighted in order to identify topics of interest for this study. This enabled us to address the frequency of particular issues as well as the way in which certain topics were addressed in the articles. The next section discusses the results that emerged from this thematic content analysis of selected newspaper articles.

## **Themes Present in Analysis**

Based on the qualitative approach used in this section of the study, we were able to define several important themes from a media analysis of newspaper articles on domestic violence. The themes uncovered in this analysis relate primarily to the way in which the selected articles portray instances of domestic violence. While it is not a fully comprehensive analysis of media reports on domestic violence, the selected articles provide a general sense of the way in which domestic violence is portrayed in local and national newspapers.

There are ten main themes that were developed through the course of the media analysis: the type of article;

- characteristics of the abuser(s);
- characteristics of the victim(s);
- threats to harms spouse, family, pets or property;
- witnessing of violence by children;
- perceptions of fear;
- firearms present, confiscated or related to domestic violence;
- value judgments about firearms and/or abuse;
- who or what is responsible for violence; and finally,
- solutions, resources and education.

We will now discuss each of these themes in greater detail.

### **Type of Article**

As previously stated in this report, the goal of the media analysis was to locate articles about domestic violence and various related factors. In our search we uncovered a total of 130 articles, 101 of which reported on events, and 29 of which served to educate or comment on the issues. Of course there is some overlap in many of these articles, where a report uses educational information to enhance the story, or when educational pieces use some examples to strengthen their argument. Many of the sub-themes included in this analysis are not mutually exclusive.

Of the selected articles, 43 related to instances of domestic violence that did not lead to murder or suicide, while 31 of the articles reported incidents where spouses and/or

children were killed, and sometimes instances where the abuser committed suicide. Beyond this, there were 27 articles that reported shootings or were gun-related that did not lead to death; however, many of the deaths discussed in the articles were related to guns in that they were either present or used in the killings. Finally, there were 13 articles that dealt with incidences of animal abuse or proposed a link between animal abuse and domestic violence.

While it is clear from a break down of the articles used in this media analysis that there is diversity, both in content and presentation, the joining thread of all of these articles is that they deal with violent crimes. The majority of this violence is related to domestic issues, firearms or animals. As we discuss further in this report, violence against members of families and animals, particularly when it involves firearms, has significant implications for our understanding of domestic violence and what can be done to eliminate it.

### **Characteristics of the Abusers**

In the reviewed articles, all of the abusers are either specified to be male or their gender remains unspecified. Research suggests that women are much more likely to be victims of domestic violence and that men are more likely to be associated with violent crimes generally, and family violence in particular (Statistics Canada, 2001). Just under half of the articles, 56 of them, deal with abusers who are either husbands, ex-boyfriends or common-law with the victims, while 8 of the articles describe other family members, such as the father or son of the abused. There are 20 male abusers who are either non-family or did not specify their relationship to the victims. There are 11 instances of pet or animal owners. Of all the abusers, 17 are reported as having a history of violence and/or a criminal record, and 10 of them have undergone psychological assessments or have psychological problems. Ten of the articles also mention alcohol or drugs as a factor. The employment status of the abusers is mentioned rarely, with 6 professionals and 2 unemployed. There are 4 instances of thieves and 2 instances of immigrant men who abuse their wives.

We were interested in examining the characteristic of abusers in media articles, because we were unable to include questions in our survey about the abuser, and we felt that we might in fact gain some insights from these articles. There are a variety of interesting and important themes that emerge from this breakdown of the abusers

characteristics. The majority of domestic abusers identified in the article are men, suggesting to readers that violence against a partner is a crime predominantly perpetrated by the husbands or partners of women. While none of the articles give any information about rates of abuse in homosexual relationships, it is clear that in regards to heterosexual relationships it is consistently men who commit the most violence against their partners.

In terms of the characteristics of the abusers, various factors such as the history of violence, criminal record, psychological problems, employment status and immigrant status are considered relevant in several of these articles. It is important to note, however, that these details do not occur in great frequency. This is most likely due to the nature of newspaper articles; many of the reports give only the bare “facts” about the situation, or they do not give a great amount of details about the abuser’s life. Nevertheless, it is significant that characteristics of abusers are indicated in roughly ten per cent of the articles as significant attributes.

It is particularly interesting that the employment status of the abusive men is reported more frequently when they are professionals, such as police officers, corrections officers or Canada Post workers. While these details might have been included to promote sympathy for these men, it is more likely that this was included because it challenges the assumed norm or stereotype of what sort of men are abusers. In this sense, it is possible that these details were included because unemployment or poverty is more often assumed characteristics of abusers.

### **Characteristics of the Victims**

The victims that were reported in these articles are predominantly women and their families. Wives, spouses, girlfriends or exes account for 56 of the reported articles. Children are victims in 18 of the reviewed articles. Women in unspecified relationships to their abusers are victims in 15 instances, while other family members or relations to the abuser account for 15 of the other victims. Animals are victims in 17 of the articles, followed by teens with 5 instances and men with only 1. Finally, there are several factors such as being disabled, aboriginal, francophone, young, or having a husband in the military that are mentioned in 8 of the articles as pertinent to women’s status as victims of domestic abuse. As with background information on the abusers, the articles often did not mention



the employment or occupational status of the victims. However, there were two instances of women being specifically characterized as “successful” or “well-educated.”

From the characteristics of the victims we are again able to see that domestic abuse is predominantly a crime committed against women and in some instances their children. Almost as regularly as children are mentioned, incidences of animal abuse are reported. While this does not necessarily reflect the occurrence of these types of victimization, it does show the vulnerability of children and pets and perhaps that fact that there is a greater degree of interest and sympathy generated when pets are abused. Other characteristics that are identified include disabled, aboriginal, francophone, young girls and isolated military wives. Though there are certainly distinct issues to be explored for each of these characteristics, the common thread joining them is that the victims’ dependence, isolation or vulnerability is taken advantage of and used against them.

Again, it is interesting to look at the two instances where women are described as successful, friendly, with great social networks, educated, and everything that counters the stereotypes about women who are abused. One of the articles makes a point of arguing that “domestic violence can happen to anyone” (Times/Transcript: December 7, 2006). While this is an important point to understand, it remains essential to look at the characteristics that are commonly present in the lives of women who are abused in order to better understand how or why they are victimized and what can be done to help prevent this.

### **Threats to Harm Spouse, Family, Pets or Property**

Another aspect of the abuse that we looked for in the articles is the types of threats against women that were reported. There are 28 instances of threats reported in the articles. Of these, 11 are death threats, 10 are threats for violence or charges of “uttering threats,” 7 are expressly gun-related, and 1 specifically deals with a threat to keep quiet about the domestic violence that occurs in the military. Most of these threats are directed at the women themselves, though there are instances of a police officer, a children’s aid worker, a brother-in-law and children that are also threatened. In one case of animal violence, a pet dog was killed as a means of threatening one woman.

While most of the reports of report only that there were threats made and do not report what the threat consisted of, some articles report more specific descriptions of what

the abusers said. In one instance a man is reported as saying to his wife, “If I can’t have you, no one will. If I go down, you’re going down with me” (CBC News: Apr 4, 2006). When being taken away by police after a brutal attack, a man told them to “bring a body bag next time” because he intended to kill the current partner of his ex-girlfriend. In another instance, an abused woman reported through tears to the police that her husband “would rather kill her than let her go” (Globe & Mail: Nov 20, 2004). Such comments and threats are similar to the stories that women and service providers are sharing in the qualitative research, and appear to be quite common in domestic violence situations.

Some of the articles, one in particular, pays attention to the difficulty that many women experience when trying to leave, even when they experience threats of violence or death. One of the victims is reported as saying that there are “so many things that go through your head when you feel threatened physically by someone that is supposed to love you and that you love” (CBC News: June 7, 2007). This article emphasizes the fact that threats do not always occur in isolation, but rather they are often accompanied by acts of kindness, which some articles referred to as the “abuse cycle” (CBC News: May 9, 2005; Times & Transcript: Jan 18, 2007). Women often feel a great deal of conflict, because in many instances they love their husbands and believe that he loves them. . Thus, we must recognize that the response to violent threats occurs in an environment of conflict, fear, and helplessness that is often characteristic of abusive situations.

It becomes clear through reading these articles that animal abuse is also used as a form of threatening abused women. “The animals are harmed as a way to threaten women, or as a way to get the children to remain quiet about the abuse that’s going on” (Daily Gleaner: May 3, 2003). While witnessing animal abuse is a form of abuse itself, it is also an incredibly powerful means of threatening or attempting to silence those who are abused. The implicit message in animal violence is that “if you say anything, this is also what will happen to you” (120). We discuss the link between animal abuse and domestic abuse later, but for now it is important to emphasize the ways in which these newspaper articles report animal abuse as a mechanism used against women in order to threaten and silence them.

## **Witnessing of Violence by Children**

In domestic violence situations, it is not uncommon for children to be witness to or even subject to violence themselves. Children are witness to or somehow related to the violent event in 47 of the articles. In the selected articles, 21 children are witness to violence, 12 are abused themselves, and 6 are killed. There are 6 instances where children are exposed to animal abuse or are the abusers of animals themselves. Family services and custody disputes are mentioned in 4 of the articles, and in 2 instances the children are kept from seeing violence.

A number of other interesting themes emerge when looking at the role children play in domestic violence situations. A couple of the articles mention the impact that either witnessing or being the direct victim of abuse can have on children (Telegraph Journal: Sep 2, 2004; Daily Gleaner: Oct 12, 2006). In fact, one of these articles suggests that the abuse of a parent witnessed by children can be equally as devastating as experiencing it themselves. The importance of parents as role models for children is also mentioned (Telegraph Journal: Jan 9, 2007). While research is inconclusive whether or not children who are abused themselves are more likely to act violently against others, some of these articles suggest a correlation between witnessing violence and bullying other children (Telegraph Journal: Sep 2, 2004).

There is certainly diversity in terms of the severity of the abuse that children experience or are witness to in the reviewed articles. In one instance the young children of an abusive father are told to call their mother a bitch (Edmonton Journal: July 5, 2005). While some of the articles about children's involvement in violence are less severe, there are some very graphic instances of child abuse and witnessing abuse reported. In one article three young children are reported as having seen their mother get stabbed through the chest by their father (Edmonton Journal: Oct 25, 2005). In another instance, an infant was in the arms of a woman when she was shot by her common-law partner (Times & Transcript: Dec 7, 2006). And in one case, an abusive father actually stabbed his daughter a few years prior to killing her mother (Globe & Mail: June 27, 2000). These are some of the more brutal instances of child exposure to domestic violence situations, but they show how devastating violence can be for children.

## **Perceptions of Fear**

Another important theme that emerges in the qualitative and quantitative component of this study is the perception of fear on the part of the victims. Fear is frequently mentioned in the articles as well; explicitly in 29 of the reviewed articles. There are 17 instances where fear of spouse, husband or male predator is reported. In 4 articles the police are reported as experiencing fear of the men and/or the situation surrounding domestic violence. In 3 of the articles, other people such as family members, neighbours and employees of a hospital are reported as experiencing fear in regards to a domestic violence incident. There is 1 instance in which a disabled woman suggests that her fear stemmed from her dependence on her abusive spouse to take care of her. Finally, there is also 1 report in which women expressed a fear of going to the authorities out of a distrust that the police would respond properly or adequately. Interestingly, these articles reaffirm the findings in the study which demonstrated that not only does domestic violence cause fear for the victim, and perhaps the children, it can create a sense of fear among family, neighbours, service providers and police.

In each of these articles that mentioned fear, greater detail is given to the experience of the women themselves, rather than just the crimes that are committed against them. In this regard, the repercussions for women are taken more seriously or at least given more importance in the articles that acknowledge the fear women experience. In one instance a formerly abused woman says, “I was very afraid for my life” (Globe & Mail: Nov 20, 2004). There is also a report of a woman who “lives in fear all the time, is afraid to go out – fearful she might see him – and panics at the least little sound” (Daily Gleaner: April 5, 2006). There are many more examples of women who are afraid of their husbands, afraid of the repercussions of leaving, and fear for their general safety (The Telegram: Dec 12, 2004; The Telegram: Oct 19, 2005; Calgary Herald: May 16, 2006). Here we see the intense and sometimes paralyzing nature of fear as experienced in abusive relationships.

In the experience of one immigrant woman, one woman says, “I’m scared of him because beating is common in my husband’s family. They beat their wives so many times... I was very scared to talk about this to anybody” (CBC News: Mar 8, 2004). Our research emphasizes that social and cultural factors create barriers for rural women which can inhibit disclosure of abuse. Although the media reports did not refer to rural or farm

women, they did indicate that fear is particularly acute for women from a different culture. Language barriers, as well as isolation and lack of education about the services that are available to them, were seen to compound this problem for women who have emigrated from another country.

It is important to remember again that these are only the instances of fear that are reported in the selected articles, which is not necessarily representative of the actual occurrence of fear in abusive or violent relationships. While we can learn a great deal from these articles, it is likely that every woman who lives in an abusive relationship experiences some sort of fear. There are also reported instances of women who “fear for the children’s safety” (Ottawa Citizen: April 4, 2006). While these articles are not comprehensive, they do give voice to the quality of the fear that perpetually exists in the lives of abused women.

### **Firearms Present, Confiscated or Related to Violence**

The presence, confiscation or ban on firearms, as well as the use of firearms in perpetrating domestic violence, is an important theme explored in this study. Firearms are mentioned in some capacity in 67 of the articles we selected. There are 24 instances of firearms being used to kill victims. In 15 of the reported incidents, firearms are used to shoot the victims, which sometimes results in death. Bans, confiscation, and weapons charges occur in 12 of the articles, and firearms are reported as being present or found in 11 of the articles. Gun owners, hunters and the debate over the gun registry are mentioned in 10 instances. Firearms are used to point at or threaten others in 7 articles, and used to shoot an animal in 1 situation. There is 1 instance of a police officer using his gun to shoot his ex-girlfriend.

The link between firearms and domestic violence is certainly complex and it is interesting to explore how this link is portrayed in the reviewed articles. While the connection between firearm ownership and domestic violence was not explicit in many of the articles, a few of the articles explored this link. One of the articles draws on statistics that suggest that “homes which have guns in them have 30 times more homicides and suicides than those without” (Telegraph Journal: Sept 2, 2004). This statistic does not suggest that gun ownership leads to domestic violence, but rather that in situations where

domestic violence occurs, firearm ownership exacerbates the chances of women and children being threatened or killed. This reinforces what many of the abused women in our study who experienced firearms victimization felt – the very presence of the firearms in their home increased the likelihood that the situation might turn deadly.

The newspaper media coverage of the gun registry is mixed, though in most instances it is viewed as a positive step towards mitigating or ending violence against women. In one of the articles about a suspected murder case, the prosecutor says of the suspect's firearm, "this type of weapon is inherently associated with criminal activity; there is no good reason for possessing his type of weapon" (Telegraph Journal: August 1, 2003). This negative comment is typical of the popular sentiments about illegal firearms covered in the media. In the few articles that discuss legal gun owners, however, there appears to be some controversy about lethality associated with gun ownership. Again, it would be inaccurate to say that gun ownership encourages violence against women; however it is clearly represented in these news articles that the severity of the violence and incidences of death is much higher in homes that possess firearms than in those that do not.

### **Value Judgments about Firearms, Violence or Abuse**

In this section we explore the way in which firearms, violence or abuse are described either negatively, positively, or in a mixed or balanced way. Of course there are always implicit value judgments in any piece of writing, despite the fact that journalistic writing attempts to avoid bias; however, the focus in this section is on the explicit value judgments that are written in these articles. Some sort of explicit value judgment is made in approximately 40 of the articles. The majority of these, 31 articles, present a predominantly negative view of firearms, violence and/or abuse. While none of the articles purport to portray domestic abuse or violence in a positive light, there are 10 articles that provide a rationale for firearms abuse, violence and domestic abuse. Finally, there are 2 articles that attempt to provide a balanced view of the issues.

The difficulty with this section is that the issues dealt with in the reviewed articles are not homogenous and therefore some require a more balanced or positive treatment than others. For example, debates about the gun registry can legitimately be discussed from both sides, whereas it is difficult to justify taking a positive stance on firearm violence itself.

Many of the incidences of domestic violence and homicide are described with words such as disturbing, unacceptable, sickening, terrible, devastating, and horrific (CBC News: May 9, 2000; Times & Transcript: May 18, 2004; Globe & Mail: Nov 20, 2004; Globe & Mail: Jan 12, 2006; Globe & Mail: Feb 10, 2006; Times & Transcript: Dec 30, 2006). In addition to this, the quotations chosen to exemplify the incidents often carry with them a moral tone. In one instance, the judge says to a man who assaulted his ex-girlfriend and killed her dog, “anyone who did what you did deserves to function behind bars” (Daily Gleaner: Nov 5, 2003).

There is a mixture of positive and negative spins on certain events. In two of the articles that have a positive value judgment about firearms, they emphasize that the hunting culture is associated with law-abiding gun owners who have love for the outdoors (CBC News: Dec 21, 2005; Toronto Southam: July 23, 1999). This certainly reinforces the description and values that we encountered around the gun culture in our qualitative research. However, other articles describe a less idyllic situation. In one instance involving a domestic homicide the police failed to take a woman’s complaints about her abusive husband seriously, saying, “These two have a long, drawn-out history. Credibility on both sides [is] poor due to [a] long history, common complaints, custody issues” (Calgary Herald: May 16, 2006). Here we see a specific instance of the police mitigating their responsibility in the death of a woman who previously contacted them to seek protection from her husband. An attempt to mitigate the seriousness of domestic violence occurs in another article which describes the experience of one man as “a nightmare” after he had been charged with assaulting his wife (CBC News: May 24, 2007).

### **Who or What is Responsible?**

Many of the articles have some implicit sense of who or what is responsible for violent crimes or the persistence of domestic abuse, though our goal is to look at the explicit instances of blame or accountability that are given. In 23 instances, the police, courts and other authorities are blamed or named responsible for the instances of violence, such as in instances where they are not responsive or do not take the violence seriously enough. Various characteristics of the abusers such as their use of drugs or alcohol, psychological problems, stress, bills or rural roots are cited in 20 of the articles. In 7 of the

articles, leniency of the laws or victims not being taken seriously enough are blamed. The victims themselves are blamed or alleged to be responsible in 6 of the articles. Animal abuse is also named in 7 of the articles as linked to the violence. Gun ownership is considered pertinent in terms of responsibility in 6 of the articles. Lack of education, racial segregation or isolation is accounted for in 4 of the articles. The community, media and general perception of abuse are each discussed in at least one of the articles as responsible for acts of violence.

It is important that we look at who, or what, is made to appear responsible in the newspaper articles reviewed. This helps us to establish perceptions about the causes of domestic violence and how they are portrayed in the newspaper media. Many of the factors that are considered causative in these articles align with the research findings of this study; however, as has been discussed already, several of the articles attempt to make excuses or cite mitigating factors to account for the violence. In one instance where a woman was attacked by her husband, she says, “all of our problems are alcohol-based... he’s the nicest person you’d ever want to meet until he drinks too much” (Times & Transcript: July 19, 2006). While this is a statement from the abused woman herself, it reflects the common belief that alcohol is the root cause of abusive behaviour. In much the same way that firearm ownership may exacerbate abusive tendencies in a dysfunctional home, blaming the abuse on alcohol does not truly address the root causes. As with all characteristics of abusers, it is not just one, but a combination of personal characteristics and social/cultural factors, that shape behaviour, define values, and create an abusive situation.

The responsibility of the police and the courts to address family violence is certainly seen as paramount in many of the articles. Many women and their families interviewed feel that their reports of violence are not taken seriously enough. It becomes clear that, particularly in court proceedings, there is divergence of opinions in terms of who is to be held accountable for escalating situations of violence. While the police and judicial system is more commonly blamed, the victims themselves are also made to appear responsible for being abused – something that is generally claimed by the defence lawyers. In the selected articles we can see that blaming the victim for contributing to, or not leaving the violence, is sometimes used as an excuse, particularly in situations that involve claims of police negligence.



## **Solutions, Resources and Education**

It is encouraging to realize that over half of the articles, 69 of them, address solutions, resources and educational information in some capacity. The most common response, in 20 of these articles, was to encourage the use of services and the creation of action plans. In 17 instances the promotion of awareness and education is considered the best response. Also with 17 articles suggest that toughening the laws about, and reaction towards, domestic violence is important. In 9 of the articles, actual facts and figures about domestic violence are reported as a means of educating the public. Greater police involvement is reported in 7 articles as a solution that should be or is implemented. A community response to domestic violence is seen as important in 6 of the articles. The importance of speaking up and speaking out about domestic violence is emphasized in 5 of the articles, while a gun-related response is taken in 4 of the articles. Finally, putting money towards programs is mentioned explicitly in 1 of the reports as a solution.

Many of the solutions offered in these articles are already in place but need to be strengthened in the community. For example, the services provided to abused women, as well as their abusers, are not new solutions to the problem, but rather are reported as needing greater support and implementation. Many of the services mentioned included women's shelters, counselling services for both the abuser and the abused, as well as strategic action plans put in place by a variety of institutions such as schools, hospitals and the police. The police response to this problem is also similar in that greater involvement and quicker response times are encouraged. In one instance, a woman who had been attacked by her husband says of the police, "I just wish they would take the situation more seriously than what they did... they have to start and take quicker actions. Otherwise, why do we go there?" (Globe & Mail: Nov 20, 2004). The general message in the articles that provide suggestions about how to reduce or eliminate domestic violence is that it needs to be taken more seriously and given greater urgency in the community at large. This is a sentiment that was expressed by many of the participants in our study as well.

The specific information provided in these articles focuses mainly on rates of domestic abuse such as when it is more likely to occur and what proportion of victims are women. Two of the articles explicitly state that women are more likely than men to be victims of domestic abuse (Daily Gleaner: Oct 12, 2006; Ottawa Citizen: July 15, 2005).

Three of the articles suggest that the most dangerous time for a woman in an abusive relationship is when she decides to leave permanently (Ottawa Citizen: April 19, 2006; Globe & Mail: Oct 6, 2002; The Telegram: Dec 12, 2004). Another article suggests that Christmas Eve is one of the most dangerous nights of the year because it coincides with the stress of the holidays, which is sometimes cited as an aggravating factor in domestic abuse incidents. Statistics from the United States suggest that “the leading cause of death for pregnant women in that country is murder by an intimate partner” (The Telegram: Sep 25, 2004). Statistics Canada reports that the rate that 2/3 of murdered women die at the hands of their intimate partners (The Telegram: Sep 25, 2004). One of the articles suggests that the best way for women to leave a violent situation is to prepare in secret, leave quickly, and stay away (Globe & Mail: Oct 5, 2002). Finally, an article that discusses the link between violence against animals and domestic abuse suggests that observing the way children behave towards animals is indicative of their ethical, moral and psychological development (CBC News: Sep 20, 1999). Many other articles suggest developing educational initiatives on such facts. This is considered one of the most significant solutions to domestic violence.

There are several reports of domestic violence reviewed in this media analysis that include education, resources and solutions to the problem. Others simply report the ‘bare facts’. There is no simple explanation of how to solve the problem of domestic violence in these articles; however, it is encouraging that some of the articles provide examples of what has helped in the past and what can be done to increase assistance to these women. By promoting a positive and consistent response to the problem of domestic violence, and fostering cooperative efforts, we will be able to address this problem in a way that has practical benefits for the women who suffer from abuse.

## **Summary**

In this media analysis we have been able to uncover some important reoccurring themes about the ways in which domestic violence is portrayed in newspaper articles. By selecting particular articles that dealt with the issues of domestic violence and violent crimes in general, we have seen some of the key treatments of the issues surrounding family violence, violence against women and firearms victimization. The specific themes addressed in this part of the report such as the characteristics of the abusers, instances of

threats, and the potential solutions offered, provide us with a foundation for better understanding the issues of domestic abuse and the way that it is understood in a broader social context. By taking a thematic approach to the analysis of these newspaper articles, we have been able to explore some of the more nuanced and descriptive elements that appear in our newspapers about domestic violence

## **4.2 Case Law Review**

As part of our research, we wanted to conduct a case law review in order to gain insights into the justice system's response to family violence, with a particular focus on cases involving firearms, sentencing terms that included firearms prohibitions and any mention of pets or animals.

When conducting any sort of case law review, it is important to note that not all court decisions or judgments are published or reported. Therefore, any such review is not necessarily going to capture all cases dealing with a certain topic or criminal code provision. In an effort to be consistent and given the budgetary limitations of the study, we used only one online database to conduct our searches, CanLII, detailed below.

### **Case Law Database**

We used CanLII, a free online case law database, for all of the case law searches. The term "CanLII" stands for "Canadian Legal Information Institute". CanLII is a non-profit organization managed by the Federation of Law Societies of Canada. CanLII's self-proclaimed goal is "to make Canadian law accessible for free on the Internet". All cases cited in this study can be accessed via CanLII's website, [www.canlii.org](http://www.canlii.org), and all citations refer to CanLII's classification system.

We searched CanLII databases for all four Atlantic Provinces, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador. We used case law data from all four provinces, as opposed to only New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island (the provinces from which we obtained our quantitative and qualitative data, because we felt that the small number of cases from only these two provinces would not give an adequate representation of family violence cases. The Atlantic Provinces share many similar characteristics in terms of population demographics, as discussed earlier in this paper, so we felt that the addition of cases from Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador would give a better picture of the justice system's treatment of family violence cases.

Submission of judgments to CanLII is done on a voluntary basis; therefore, there is some variation as to the scope of each database, in terms of the earliest available decisions.

This was another factor in our decision to review cases from all four Atlantic Provinces. CanLII's website lists the following information with respect to the scope of the databases we used, in terms of the date of the earliest decisions in each database:

New Brunswick Court of Appeal (NBCA):	2001-05-01
Court of Queen's Bench of New Brunswick (NBQB):	2002-05-01
New Brunswick Provincial Court (NBPC):	2003-01-13
Supreme Court of Nfld. & Labrador – Appeal Division (NLCA):	2001-01-01
Supreme Court of Nfld. & Labrador – Trial Division (NLSCTD):	2003-01-01
Provincial Court of Nfld. & Labrador (NLPC):	2001-03-01
Nova Scotia Court of Appeal (NSCA):	1990-01-01
Nova Scotia Supreme Court (NSSC):	1999-01-01
Nova Scotia Provincial Court (NSPC):	2002-01-01
Supreme Court of Prince Edward Island – Appeal Division:	1993-01-01
Supreme Court of Prince Edward Island – Trial Division:	1993-01-01

### **Search Parameters**

We used the following key words and terms when searching CanLII, either alone or in combination: crime; criminal; family violence; domestic violence; spousal abuse; partner abuse; spousal assault; sexual assault; uttering threats; criminal harassment/stalking; manslaughter; murder; peace bond; and restraining order.

We used the following key words and terms as subsearches within the results obtained above: girlfriend; spouse; wife; common-law/common law; husband; firearm; gun; handgun; rifle; weapon; pet; animal; dog; cat; horse; and cow.

### **Overview of Results re: Animal Abuse**

We could not find any reference to animal or pet abuse in any of the cases we obtained through our searches. As indicated in other sections of this paper, however, animal and pet abuse is not necessarily a criminal matter, and therefore, we can only speculate that it either did not occur, or if it did occur, it was not presented as evidence at any of the trials or sentencing hearings.

### **Overview of Results re: Firearm Usage / Prohibitions**

Of the 23 cases we reviewed, there were only 3 cases, *C.C.*, *Foster* and *Pearson*, in which firearms were involved in the offences that were at issue before the Court. In the *C.C.* case, the perpetrator was an officer with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans prior to the incident, and was convicted of a charge of pointing a firearm, among other charges. In *Foster* and *Pearson*, the victims were shot and killed in both cases. In both cases, multiple firearms were seized by the police following the incidents. In the *Pearson* case, the Court notes that Pearson was an “experienced hunter” who owned 7 seven guns.

Despite the relatively small number of cases involving firearms, the Court issued firearms prohibitions pursuant to the *Criminal Code of Canada* in 13 cases, including the *Wall* decision, in which the Prince Edward Island Appeal Division added the firearms prohibition on appeal. In addition to these 13 cases, the Court noted that the perpetrators were already subject to firearms prohibitions resulting from prior sentences in 2 other cases, *J.J.M.* and *Butt*.

In several cases, including *Foster*, the Court makes specific mention of the Criminal Code provisions with respect to a minimum 4 year sentence for the commission of an offence involving a firearm.

### **Overview of Results re: Prior Criminal Convictions**

There were only 5 cases in which the Court noted that the perpetrator had no previous criminal record: *Wall*, *Foster*, *Harron*, *C.C.* and *Connors*, however, in the Assoun case, the Court did not specifically mention Assoun’s criminal record, but did note that his pre-sentence report indicated violence against former partners and children, including “physical, sexual and emotional abuse”.

Many of the cases in which the perpetrator’s criminal record was mentioned involved alcohol-related criminal histories; however, since details of criminal records were not included in many decisions, it is difficult to speculate as to the number of perpetrators who actually had alcohol-related convictions.

One decision was of particular interest with respect to the Court’s treatment of a prior criminal record. In the *Beamish* case, the Supreme Court of Prince Edward Island –

Trial Division, cited Beamish's criminal record as an aggravating factor in sentencing, but also stated that the criminal record "was a negative but not undue in the sense that it doesn't place him in the worst category of offenders". The Court did not give any further details about Beamish's criminal record; however, the Court did cite "evidence of past acts of domestic abuse" as another aggravating factor. Beamish was convicted of 2nd degree murder by a jury, and the Court sentenced him to the mandatory sentence of life in prison, and chose to set a period of 18 years before he would become eligible for parole (the Court had noted that the precedents in Prince Edward Island in similar cases indicated a range between 10 and 15 years for ineligibility for parole in second degree murder cases). The Court also noted that the murder was "brutal" and that the "circumstances were horrific".

### **Overview of Results re: Sentencing Principles**

We have summarized each case in the attached table entitled Case Law Summaries and the attached List of Cases - which can be found in the Case Law Summary Appendix 1. As evident from the table, not all judges chose to specifically set out the mitigating and aggravating factors that they considered in sentencing the perpetrators. In fact, the aggravating/mitigating factors were set out (sometimes only in part) in only 11 of the 23 cases. In some cases, the Court would review the background and circumstances of the perpetrator, the victim, their relationship and/or the circumstances that led to the criminal charges, but they would not specify which of these findings were to be considered mitigating or aggravating. We listed all factors that were specifically indicated as mitigating or aggravating under the Sentencing column, and in those cases where judges were not specific, we included the information in the Facts/Background/Other column.

In those cases in which the Court specified the mitigating/aggravating factors, the nature of the relationship or a mention of domestic violence were cited in 10 of the 11 cases as aggravating factors. In the *Batstone* case, the court specifically mentioned only the perpetrator's history of disregard for court orders and the "vindictiveness" of the perpetrator as aggravating factors. The Court did note the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator elsewhere in the decision, however.

In 2 of the 11 cases mentioned above, the Court specifically identifies subsection 718.2(a) of the *Criminal Code* in the discussion of aggravating factors. These two cases

were *King* and *Foster*. In the *King* case, the Court stipulates that “spouse” as set out in this section of the *Criminal Code* should not be limited to married spouses.

With respect to the mitigating factors cited in the decisions, we could find no real consistent pattern. A few of the cases cited the perpetrators’ lack of education, poor family background or health concerns, but many of the mitigating factors seemed to be more closely associated with the individual facts of each case, rather than an overall pattern. There were several cases, however, in which a plea of guilty was cited as a mitigating factor.

Two cases that should be noted in this discussion of sentencing are *Bennett* and *J.J.M.* In *Bennett*, the perpetrator was charged with one count of summary conviction assault and another charge of breach of an undertaking (also summary conviction). The Crown and defence counsel submitted a joint submission with respect to sentencing, asking for a 45 day period of incarceration. The Court rejected this submission, and sentenced *Bennett* to a total of 6 months incarceration (reduced to 5 months, 16 days to reflect the time he had already been in custody). The Court stated that the joint recommendation was refused because “it would serve to perpetuate the myth that assaulting a spouse is not a serious matter, even if there is a history of such violence”.

In *J.J.M.*, the perpetrator was convicted of assaulting his partner of 14 years and her brother, who had attempted to come to her aid. The Court noted that there had been a long history of abuse, and the perpetrator had a lengthy criminal record, including 5 prior convictions for assaulting this same victim. The Crown had asked for a sentence of 18 months incarceration, while defence counsel had requested 12 months. In arriving at a total sentence of 2 years, the Court stated that: “...the accused has demonstrated such clear and blatant disregard for [the victim] and for Court orders that I have come to the conclusion that this case is one of the rare occasions where the Court should impose a sentence in excess of that sought by counsel”.



## SECTION 5 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Another important component of this research, which helped form the backdrop for the study, was an extensive literature review and the creation of an annotated bibliography. (To peruse the annotated bibliography see Appendix Z) The annotated bibliography is an electronic document comprised of 43 items covering the following literature/topic themes:

1) family violence, specifically in the context of New Brunswick and factors related to it, 2) firearms, 3) animal abuse, 4) the link between family violence, firearms, and animal abuse, 5) homicide, femicide, and intimate-partner killings; and finally, 6) solutions and strategies for addressing family violence.

The information that appears in the annotated bibliography comes from sources such as journal articles, reports, websites, and books. Journals that were drawn on frequently include the *Journal of Family Violence*, *Violence Against Women*, and *Interpersonal Violence*, among many others. In addition, information from government reports, government abuse protocols, statistical reports, and legal cases in New Brunswick were included. Information was also gathered from websites, collected from letters or pamphlets from various associations, and resources from papers and lectures presented at Conferences. The remainder of this section will present an overview and brief summary of our findings in each of the literature/ topic themes.

## 5.1 Family violence

Family violence and violence against women is a societal issue. Violence is typically perpetrated by males, although females do make up a small minority of intimate partners who engage in abusive behaviors. In one study (Thompson, Saltzman, & Bibel, 1999) which analysed a compilation of police records for 8 violent crimes (e.g., murder, rape, etc) it was found that females are at a greater risk than males of being a victim of intimate partner violence, and that 99% of the offenders were male and 100% of the victims were female from this sample. In addition, these researchers also found that a weapon was used in 89% of the crimes, and that 49% of the offenders were partners or ex-partners of the victim; more murders were committed by partners or former partners than by non-partners. There are many factors that are associated and linked with family violence. In this literature review there will be a discussion not only of family violence, but of animal abuse, and firearms as well, ending with some recommendations that have been put forth by researchers in these areas. There are specific circumstances that can present additional challenges to victims of family violence and these will be highlighted as well. These include living in a rural context, experiencing family violence in the context of a police family, and the experiences of children.

Family violence has existed throughout the years. Warner and Lunny (2003) explored the history of marital violence as it presented itself in Portsmouth from 1653-1781. The researchers found that there were 356 reported cases of intimate partner violence perpetrated by males. Records from this time period also showed that assaults against intimate partners were usually more severe than attacks on strangers or acquaintances. In addition, it was found that women were assaulted on more occasions before launching a complaint as compared to the strangers who had been assaulted. Warner and Lunny also found that lethal weapons were more likely to be have been used in intimate partner assaults. The authors noted that the intimate partner violence seemed to increase when soldiers were demobilized and when men were experiencing difficult financial or employment stress.

According to Se'ver, Dawson, and Johnson (2004), internationally, at least a third of women have experienced some type of abuse or violence in their lifetime. The majority of this abuse is inflicted by a partner or former partner. Approximately 50% of all women

murdered in a year are killed by current or former partner. Se'ver and colleagues see the continuation of intimate partner violence as stemming from a lack of adequate resources, cultural and patriarchal norms and values, and the absence of political will. These researchers also note that intimate partner violence in a rural context may be more severe and complicated than those represented in urban areas.

Women respond to the abuse that they experience in various ways, and if they are able to leave, they may face a variety of obstacles and challenges. Typically, it has been estimated that a woman experiences much abuse before she contacts the police, and is beaten on average 30 times before a formal police report is made (Coalition for Gun Control, 2005). A study by Ruiz-Perez, Pariente, and Plazaola-Castano (2006), conducted in Spain surveyed women on their experiences of intimate partner violence, and their typical responses to it. Participants comprised 385 women who had presented at primary health care centres. These researchers found that the overall prevalence of any type of abuse amongst participants was 22%. Of women who had experienced abuse, 68% of them demonstrated an active response to the abuse, which usually meant an attempt at separation from the abuser. Of the women who had been abused, only 15% disclosed their history to their physician.

A study conducted by Statistics Canada in 1998 revealed a profile of domestic violence in Canada. This research demonstrated that the proportion of male victims to female victims was 11% to 89%. The strongest predictors of wife assault were found to be: being a young age of couple, living in a common-law relationship, long-term unemployment of the male, witnessing abuse as a child, and an emotionally abusive current relationship. Of the cases analyzed by Statistics Canada, charges were laid in 68% of the cases. Women did not press charges in 20% of the cases.

#### *Rural challenges*

Within the province of New Brunswick, 51% of individuals reside in a rural area; meaning that many instances of family violence will occur in rural areas which have unique challenges as compared to urban areas (Hornosty & Doherty, 2003). Hornosty and Doherty identified several obstacles that may complicate matters for a woman attempting to leave her relationship; women who are experiencing family violence, and living in a rural area, are likely to have trouble finding employment, and accessing education. They

also may have trouble finding daycare services for children. Access to medical treatment is also more challenging for women in a rural context; often requiring a fair amount of travel to reach the closest hospital. In addition to this, many women are not permitted by their abusers to use any form of transportation, and so they are kept isolated. Women living in rural areas may have challenges trying to find housing if they do try to leave their partner. Unfortunately, the social services that exist for rural families are typically less than what can be offered in urban centres. As well, transition houses which offer protection and resources to women are often only located in urban areas. Furthermore, these women also need to contest with strong traditional and patriarchal values which are often prevalent in these contexts.

The impact of family violence can be very damaging on children. Infants are the group that is most at risk for fatalities in child abuse (Government of New Brunswick, 2001). Children who are raised in an environment of family violence and children who are abused often have attachment problems and difficulties maintaining relationships and attaching later on adulthood (Government of New Brunswick). These children often experience mental health problems; many individuals who are diagnosed with specific types of mental illness (e.g., borderline personality disorder) report histories of experiencing abuse, especially sexual abuse; in addition they are also susceptible to engaging in self-destructive and harming behavior and attempt suicide (Mitton, Links, & Durocher, 1997).

Certain populations have been of particular interest to family violence researchers. Johnson, Todd, and Subramanian (2005) conducted a study involving police families, based on the premise that violence in police families may be particularly high as research from the 1970s documented high rates of violent behavior towards a spouse amongst officers. Many risk factors for family violence are prevalent within the police culture, such as exposure to violence, and increased stress. In the study by Johnson and colleagues, 453 officers, 367 of which were male and 68 female, who had reported co-habiting with a partner, were administered surveys. The surveys comprised questions on work and family issues. Their results supported what has been found previously in the literature, that violence exposure is associated with increased family violence. In addition, burnout and role spillover are also associated with increased risk for family violence.

Due to these risk factors for family violence which are often present in police culture, both the general public and the justice system have been concerned with how police officers may handle intimate partner violence situations if they themselves have been perpetrators (Morgan, Nackerud, & Yegidis, 1998). In addition, police families are likely to have weapons in their home; which, according to Kellerman and colleagues (1993) is likely to increase the likelihood of a homicide occurring inside the home. Erwin and colleagues (2005) conducted a study where they analyzed a police department's Internal Investigation Division from 1992 until 1998. The majority of the officers during this time were male and Caucasian. These researchers found that most intimate partner violence cases involved perpetrators who were middle-aged men, from an ethnic minority, with an average of 8 years on the force. The consequences facing these officers once incidents were reported included being immediately suspended from duty (64%), having a protection order against them (26%) and being immediately arrested (17%). These authors concluded from the results of their study that police officers are treated comparably to individuals in the general public, when accused of intimate partner violence.

## **5.2 Animal abuse**

Abuse towards animals often coexists with family violence and intimate partner violence. The abuse towards the animal is often used as a method to hurt family members, or to control them. Arkow (1996) reports that approximately 60% of families in the United States who meet the criteria for child abuse or neglect have also abused or mistreated pets. Frequently this abuse occurs in front of children. Arkow suggests that animal abuse often perpetuates the context of terror and demonstrates the batterer's power. It also removes a sense of support and comfort for her, by hurting an animal she is attached to. Animal abuse discourages the victim from leaving. Animal abuse can occur along a continuum, varying from neglect to active abuse and torture of animals.

Also, women and children often develop very close bonds to their family pets or farm animals. This means that when women attempt to leave their abusive partners, they or their children may hesitate to leave because of their attachments to the animal. Unfortunately, transition houses do not accept animals in most cases, and so women often have to leave their animals behind. Because of the links that have been found between family violence and animal abuse, animal and human welfare organizations are working more closely together now. Violence towards animals has been found to be an indicator of potential aggression towards humans later on in a child's life (McIntosh, 2002).

A research study by McIntosh (2002) involving transition houses in Calgary found that women delay seeking shelter and safety because they are concerned with leaving their pets, and that family violence often co-occurs with animal abuse. 56% of participants who owned pets reported that their partner had threatened to hurt or kill or had actually followed through upon a threat towards one of their pets.

Gullone, Volant and Johnson (2006) also researched the co-occurrence of family violence and animal abuse. These authors saw animal abuse as a way of harming or intimidating others and as a displacement of aggression from humans onto animals. 104 women who had experienced family violence were recruited from transition houses and outreach services; 102 women from the community acted as the comparison group. All participants had owned a pet in their most recent relationship and interviews were conducted over the telephone. Gullone and colleagues found that in the family violence

sample, 46% of individuals had their pets threatened, and in the community sample, only 6% had. Again, it was found that women reported delaying leaving their abusive relationship, for a period of a week or more, because of being concerned about their pet's safety. The most common type of animal abuse that was reported involved kicking. Finally, it was also found that many children were exposed to the animal abuse, and also engaged in it. Childhood cruelty to animals has been identified as a risk factor for later becoming a perpetrator of violence against others (Dadds, Witing, & Hawes, 2006; Boat, 1995).

Another research study by Faver and Strand (2003) also surveyed women at transition houses, both in urban and rural areas, to explore the incidence and experiences of animal abuse. Sixty-one women participated in the study and were administered questionnaires. The results of this study showed that almost half of the women from this sample reported that their partners had threatened to harm their pets. More rural than urban women reported that concern for their pets had affected their decision concerning leaving or staying in the relationship.

Despite the common occurrence of animal abuse, and a woman's reluctance to leave relationships or stay away because of their concern for animals, some transition houses frequently fail to ask about animal abuse during a woman's stay (Flynn, 2000). Flynn recruited 107 female victims of abuse from a shelter in South Carolina. Of the sample, 40.2% of women reported owning/or having owned a pet during an abusive relationship. Of women with pets, 46.5% reported that their partner had threatened or actually harmed their pet. No pets had been killed by a partner. There were two instances of pet abuse by children. The majority of pet owners found their pets to be very important sources of support in dealing with their abusive experiences. Furthermore, Flynn found that women whose pets had been abused reported stronger emotional bonds to their pets than those whose pets had not been abused. Fifty percent of women who had pets had needed to leave their pets with the abuser upon their departure. Women also reported delaying seeking help because of concern for their pet's safety.

Ascione and colleagues (1997) conducted a large scale study interviewing and administering questionnaires to women from 5 Utah crisis shelters. A community sample of women who had no history of abuse also participated. The sample included 101 battered

women and a group of 60 comparison community women. The results of this study showed that there was actually a lower pet ownership rate among the shelter sample. There was also a higher pet turnover rate among the shelter group. Women who were in the shelter group were less likely to report that their partners helped them care for their pets. Fifty-two percent of shelter women reported their partners had threatened to hurt their pets, as compared to 16.7% of the community sample. Hurting or killing of pets was reported by 54% of shelter women versus only 3.5% of community women. Almost 25% of shelter women reported that concern for their pets had made them delay their decision to seek help at a shelter. Approximately 50% of shelter women reported their children had witnessed pet abuse vs. 4% of community sample. There are higher and more severe rates of abuse of animals by children of the shelter women.

Ascione (1998) analyzed more data pertaining to animal abuse and family violence, this time from 38 interviews with female victims at a shelter in Utah. Of the women who had owned a pet, 71% reported actual or threatened harm of their pet. Fifty-seven percent of women had a pet that was actually harmed. Thirty-two percent of women with children reported that one or more of their children had hurt or killed one of their pets. In some states, the potential for cruelty to animals has been used as an indicator of the severity of abuse and may help impose penalties against the abuser, leading to having the abuser removed from the home.

Ascione and colleagues (1997) conducted a study involving service providers to explore their opinions on family violence and animal abuse, and measure how often they collected information on animal abuse. Questionnaires were sent out to service providers at 50 shelter programs and the response rate was a high 96%. The majority of service providers indicated that women seeking shelter mention experiences of animal abuse. Forty out of 48 service providers reported believing that domestic violence and companion animal abuse coexist, however only 13 out of 48 personnel collected data on it.



### **5.3 Firearms & homicide**

Firearms are often the cause of death or critical assault in the case of family violence situations (Kellerman & Heron, 1999). Kellerman and colleagues (1993) decided to explore police and medical examination data from 186 homicides that occurred in three different countries. The results found that keeping a gun in the home was strongly associated with increased risk of homicide; and usually the homicide of a family member or intimate partner. In addition it was found that the use of illicit substances and a history of physically fighting in the home are also important risk factors for homicide in the home. These authors concluded then that guns do not offer protection but instead put family members at more risk when they are kept in the home.

Azrael and Hemenway (2000) decided to explore the common thought that in the United States guns are typically kept in the home for “protection.” The researchers felt that the usefulness of this justification is in dispute. Guns appear to be a risk factor for homicide, suicide, and unintentional shootings in the home. Azrael and Hemenway conducted a national random telephone survey of 1906 US individuals. Participants were questioned about hostile gun displays and use of guns and other weapons as self-defense in the home. The results of the survey indicated that 13/1906 participants reported that a gun had been displayed against them at home. Two of 1906 reported using a gun in self-defense, while 24 reported using another weapon (i.e. knife, bat) as self-defense. The majority of guns used against people in the home were by men against women. The authors concluded that these results indicate that guns may be used to frighten family members and that weapons are more commonly used against intruders than are guns.

Vacha and MacLaughlin (2004) conducted research examining gun ownership in the USA comparing low-income and middle-class families. Surveys were administered to the parents of school children, and student discussion groups were held in the elementary groups. The researchers found that a higher rate of victimization and self-protection from crime existed among the low-income families. Twenty-six percent of low-income parents had been threatened by a gun or shot at, compared to 7% of middle-class parents. Although middle-class families were more likely to own a gun, they were also more likely to keep it locked and unloaded, whereas low-income families, though less likely to own a gun, were more likely to practice unsafe storage of firearms. Interestingly, the low-income families

also reported more family violence (middle-class families reported none). This would place IPV victims in low-income families in danger due to unsafe storage of the firearms.

Research has been done on context of gun ownership within Canada (Block, 1998). A random sample of the Canadian population participated in a survey concerning gun ownership; the Canadian respondents were also compared with participants from England and Wales, Scotland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, France, Sweden, Austria, and the United States. This study found that Canadians fell in the mid-range for firearms ownership, when compared to the other countries. Results also indicated that nearly 22% of Canadian households possessed at least one firearm. According to Dandurand (1998) the national household ownership rate of firearms is approximately 26 percent in Canada. Block's study revealed that possession of a firearm was highest in the United States, at 48.6%. Within Canada, individuals in the Atlantic Provinces owned the most guns with at least 36% owning at least one gun; in addition, within the Atlantic Provinces most gun owners possessed rifles. The study also found that 95.1% of Canadian households with a firearm possessed a long gun. Twelve percent of Canadian gun owning households had a handgun. Most Canadian respondents indicated that they used the gun for the purpose of hunting. Furthermore, size of the place of residence was related to gun ownership; individuals in smaller communities were more likely to own a gun; 33.6% of Canadian respondents from small towns owned a long gun, compared to 1.2% owning a long gun in the largest cities.

Tutty (1999) conducted a research study in Alberta where 41 women and 23 service providers were interviewed. The purpose of the study was to explore women's experiences with domestic violence and threats involving firearms. Fifty percent of the female victims were rural residents. The results indicated that service providers estimated between 5 and 20% of women they had worked with had been threatened or harmed by firearms. Of the female victims, 29 of 41 women described experiencing such severe beatings that death could have resulted. Sixty-six percent of these women were given death threats. Abusers threatened to commit suicide in approximately 40% of the cases. Half of the female victims experienced sexual abuse. A third of the women did not involve the police when firearms were being threatened to be used against them. The majority of incidents involving firearms fell into the categories of the abusive partner making explicit threats to use the

firearm, without producing one, or a traumatic incident occurring involving the firearm being pointed or shot at the victim.

The Violence Policy Center (2005) disseminates information on firearms and domestic violence. It has been found that a woman who is a victim of intimate partner violence is 7.2 times more likely to be murdered if there is a gun in the home. Also, women are more likely to be killed by their spouse or family member than being murdered by a stranger. Children who have been exposed to and witnessed domestic violence with the use of firearms have been found to exhibit more externalizing behavior and more problematic behaviors than those who do not.

Saltzman and colleagues (1992) undertook research to compare the risk of death and injury during firearm associated family violence assaults with the risks during non-firearm family violence assaults. Police reports from Georgia were analyzed for the year of 1984; the sample included 142 victims of nonfatal family violence assaults, and 23 victims. Saltzman et al. found that assaults involving firearms were three times more likely to result in death as compared to assaults involving cutting weapons. Firearm associated assaults were 23.4 times more likely to end in death as compared to assaults involving other weapons or bodily force. In sum, assaults involving firearms were 12 times more likely to be fatal than non-firearm use in the assault.

Sorenson and Wiebe (2004) examined the use of weapons and firearms on women in intimate partner assaults. Brief structured interviews were conducted with 417 women from emergency shelters. It was found that 36.7% of the women reported a firearm had been used against them. The use of a handgun was two times more likely than a long gun. Abused women were much less likely to use a weapon against their abuser, than to have it used against them. Some women (17%) did not know where the abuser kept the gun, and 41.2% of the women reported the gun being kept in an unsafe manner (unlocked and loaded, or unlocked with ammunition). Approximately 64% of those who had guns in the home reported that the partner had used the guns to scare, threaten, or harm her.; 71.4% reported the partner threatened to shoot or kill her. Some women reported that the abuser threatened to kill himself; 3.1% reported the abuser threatened to harm or kill the children. 5.1% of the women reported that their partner had shot at them. The majority (91.8%) of women reported that if a law was passed where in order to purchase a firearm the opinion

of the person's spouse must be sought, they would not give their consent for their partner to purchase a gun. In terms of opinions on policy suggestions, 67.9% of women reported that having a personalized or "smart gun" in the home would make things worse for them.

The impact of the murder of a mother on a child has been explored by Lewandowski and colleagues (2004). The death of a parent during childhood or adolescence is a very critical event which brings with it much stress; this is especially the case in the context of a parent (i.e. mother) being murdered by a father. Even if the parent does not die, the attempted murder, or prolonged domestic violence, is a trauma that affects the child. Little research exists on children who have survived the murder of their mother at the hands of their father. The purpose of the study by Lewandowski and colleagues was to present descriptive data on the surviving children of women who have been killed by their partners. A sample of children was drawn from police reports in various cities throughout the USA. Interviews were conducted with remaining relatives or individuals who possessed sufficient information. There were 121 cases of femicide and 57 cases of attempted homicide included in the case analysis; 237 children survivors comprised this sample. The results indicated that 63% of the femicide victims had children less than 18 years old who were exposed to the murder. In addition, at least 9% of these children were victims of child abuse. In regards to any therapeutic interventions following the traumatic incident, 58% of the homes received counseling after the femicide. Finally, it was reported that the majority of homicides and attempted homicides took place in the home of the victim.

Guns have been identified as the most frequently used murder weapon in intimate partner homicides (McFarlane et al., 1998). McFarlane and colleagues wished to examine the role of weapons in the context of family violence against a pregnant victim. An ethnically diverse sample of 199 abused women participated in this study and were interviewed. These women were also given a variety of assessment measures, such as the Index of Spouse abuse, among others. Abused pregnant women reported experiencing high levels of violence. There were similarities found in the levels of abuse and access to guns across ethnic groups.

Research has been done comparing men who murdered intimate partners with men who murdered men. Dobash and colleagues (2004) found that typically men who kill their

wives are portrayed as “ordinary men.” Data from a larger study, the Murder in Britain study, were used in this study; the intimate partner murder group was comprised of 106 cases whereas the murdering other men group was comprised of 424 cases. It was found that 11% of men who killed a partner had had fathers who had abused their mothers, compared to 23% of men who eventually killed another man. Concerning childhood backgrounds, men who killed an intimate partner appear to have had more conventional childhoods, even though both groups experienced considerably more problems than the typical individual.

Doherty (2006) conducted an analysis on domestic homicide and murder-suicide cases within the province of New Brunswick, from 1984-2005. Twenty-eight female deaths were examined, between 1984 and 2005; 19 homicides and 9 murder-suicides. A variety of data sources were utilized in Doherty’s analysis, including non-published information and psychiatric assessments, among many other sources of data. Some of the factors that were examined across the cases include: relevant social relationship, background information on the victims, type of weapon used, location of the crime. Doherty found that more deaths occurred when the couples were living together. In 46% of the cases the victim was killed by a firearm. The majority of deaths occurred in rural locations or small towns. In terms of substance use, alcohol or drug use at the time of the crime was reported by the perpetrator in the majority of the cases. Doherty also examined how the legal system treated those specific cases that were analyzed. It was found that sentences given to the accused in these cases ranged from first and second degree murder, to manslaughter and criminal negligence. Of 19 cases, only 2 men were tried and convicted of first degree murder. From this analysis, it would seem that family violence was not always properly recognized or acknowledged in some of these court cases. Overall, Doherty found that the following variables, a history of family violence, rural residence, and presence of firearms in the home, are associated with abusive situations that are at high risk for lethality in New Brunswick.

The Canadian Department of Justice (2005) released a report on manslaughter in cases involving intimate relationships. Individuals at risk of being killed by their partners include: females, younger individuals, Aboriginals, having experienced a history of violence in previous intimate relationships, common-law relationships, being

separated/divorced, the presence of firearms, alcohol abuse, and pregnancy. The Department of Justice also estimated that firearms were used to commit more than 33% of the spousal murders in Canada between 1974-2000, and that knives are the weapons most frequently used in spousal homicides. The report involved a case analysis of 56 manslaughter cases involving intimate relationships were reviewed (from 1991). Of the 56 cases, 36 involved male offenders and 20 involved female offenders. Women offenders were more likely to have been previously abused by the victim. Twenty-six percent of the male murderers had previous criminal records. Most of the male offenders received sentences ranging from 6-12 years. Twenty-five percent of male offenders were classified as having a mental illness. Children were present during several of the murders.

Certain theoretical perspectives predict that defendants who victimize estranged female partners will be punished more severely than those who are currently partnered with the victim. A study was conducted by Dawson (2003) examining the different outcomes of intimate partner homicides, compared on relationship status. Data consisted of the total number of intimate partner homicides that occurred in Toronto, Ontario, from 1974-1996 that resulted in a conviction (N=144). A multivariate analysis was performed, examining the various variables (i.e. relationship state, relationship status, defendant characteristics, situational characteristics, legal factors). In 14% of the cases, guns were the method of killing. More individuals were convicted who committed the crime while separated; 60% of defendants in separation killings vs. 33% in “intact relationship” killings were convicted. Sentences were also longer for separation killers (12.95 years vs. 8.58 years).

## **5.4 Proposed Actions and Strategies**

Based on the body of research that has been conducted on family violence, firearms, and animal abuse, we found that researchers have posited a variety of actions and strategies for changes; some of these will be discussed below.

One of the main recommendations that has been put forth is that human and animal welfare organizations need to work together even more closely than they have previously, since abuse to the two populations seem to co-occur so frequently (Boat, 1995 ; Doris Day Animal Foundation, 2002 ; Ascione, Weber, & Wood, 1997). Arkow (1996) suggests that there should be cross-reporting and data exchanges between human and animal welfare organizations in order to deal appropriately with both types of abuse.

When animal abuse is an issue, few women actually discuss it with the transition house workers, and it is not always asked about during in-take interviews. The consequences of children (and of women) witnessing animal abuse can be very negative, McIntosh (2002) suggests that more education and attention is needed on animal abuse in the context of family violence, so that if animal abuse was present in a woman's case, it can be dealt with more effectively. Information on the potential for children's cruelty to animals may be useful in interventions for children who have witnessed intimate partner violence (Ascione, 1998). Faver and Strand (2003) recommend that service providers investigate whether women who are trying to leave abusive relationships have concerns for their animals' welfare, because concern for animals has been identified as an obstacle to a woman leaving her abusive relationship.

Piper (2003) cautions about over emphasizing the link between animal abuse and interpersonal violence, and advocates for the treatment of families and victims by first becoming aware of their own individual conflicts and challenges, and not approaching the situation with any presumptions.

In terms of some recommendations for identifying abuse, McFarlane and colleagues (1998) identified pregnancy as being an ideal time to try and obtain information as to whether a woman is in an abusive relationship, or not. Routine abuse assessment is recommended. Pregnancy is a time when women have increased contact with the health-care system and so it is an ideal time to assess and intervene with regards to abuse. Bair-Merritt and colleagues (2006) found that intimate partner violence screening via audiotape

may be more effective than using questionnaires; they conducted a randomized trial in urban centres, involving 497 females who were given an intimate partner violence screening either by a written questionnaire or audiotape.

Women felt that the audiotape method made them more comfortable and gave them the most privacy.

In terms of recommendations surrounding gun use and policy, Killias and Haas (2002) suggest that the best policy is to keep guns and weapons out of the hands of people who are at risk of criminal behavior, or who have mental health issues. Tutty (1999) posits that applications for firearm licenses need to be reviewed thoroughly before being granted. In one study by Sorenson & Wiebe (2004) it was found that the majority of women favored a policy requiring spousal notification/consultation prior to firearm purchases, even though some women still felt as if they would not be safe enough (from harm of their partner) to voice their real opinion on the purchase. Tutty (1999) has suggested that more education is needed about woman abuse in general, and regarding firearms, perhaps through schools. In addition, the idea was raised that service providers could question women directly about whether firearms are involved in their abuse, instead of just asking about weapons in general.

In addition, Ahmann (2001) reports that health care professionals need to be urged to raise awareness about the dangers of guns in and outside the homes. Service providers at a variety of locales then not just at transition houses can be responsible for educating on firearms, and asking about their existence in the home. In addition, the ASK campaign (Asking Saves Kids) is attempting to encourage parents to ask about whether there are guns present in the homes where children play. This campaign was launched by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Society of Pediatric Nurses (SPN).

More research is also needed on firearms in Canada. Danduram (1998) identifies a gap in the literature regarding the types of firearms used in crime, their origins, and the means through which they were acquired. Danduram also suggests that research should focus on evaluating the impact of past and current legislation on firearms, to assess the effectiveness of legislation and policies.



Family violence in a rural area presents its own set of specific challenges, for example, firearms are much more likely to be present in homes, services for victims are less likely to be available, and there is a myriad of other possible obstacles that exist for women trying to leave their abusive relationships in this type of setting. Se'ver, Dawson, and Johnson (2004) noted that resources allocated to preventing and treating family violence incidents are disproportionately allocated to urban areas, and that many studies conducted on family violence take place in the urban centres, so we are lacking information on these women's experiences. Hornosty and Doherty (2003) conducted an in-depth study to identify and recommend ways to improve community responses to intimate partner violence in rural areas. Over 50 abused farm and rural women were interviewed, and community focus groups were also held. Based on their data analysis, Hornosty and Doherty put forth several recommendations to help deal with family violence in a rural area and they suggested many systemic changes that are necessary. Some of the recommendations generated include, economic changes, such as generating more income opportunities for women in rural areas, starting homemakers' pensions, and educating rural employers on family violence in order to promote supportive workplace environments. In terms of rural infrastructure changes, Hornosty and Doherty suggested more outreach services and transition houses for women; in addition workers in these organizations need to be better educated and sensitized on family violence and service coordination needs to take place among the service providers. Ways of addressing socio-cultural factors were raised, and these include improving confidentiality measures surrounding family violence; this is particularly necessary in rural areas and small towns, as privacy is often difficult to maintain. In addition, the cultural attitude that private matters are not a public concern needs to be addressed and modified; people need education on family violence, and the effects of children being exposed to it. Furthermore, service providers who come into contact with women from rural areas need to validate the woman's rural experiences and the special unique circumstances surrounding her situation, as well as address any concerns about animals and pets that she may have. Lastly, the lack of transportation issue needs to be addressed, as well as toll-free crisis hot lines that are widely advertised (since in rural areas, women may need to make long-distance phone calls which show up on their phone bill in order to seek help).

## **SECTION 6 – RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study was conducted as participatory action research so considerable attention was given to involving the participants, particularly the abused rural women we interviewed who had experienced firearms victimization firsthand, in the identification of possible solutions to firearms abuse and indirect threats in domestic violence situations. Because we were collecting the data in two largely rural provinces, we asked participants in the qualitative research to consider the unique factors and challenges associated with the social, economic and cultural context of rural life. This was a significant, and often empowering, component of the research process. After sharing their insights into the unique barriers faced by abused women, many of the women interviewed expressed their gratitude for being invited to comment on solutions. Most had never before been asked for their views on how to help other rural women. The thoughtful responses of these women, and all of the people who participated in focus groups, provided numerous ideas for removing firearms from abusive homes, making the link between animal abuse and family violence, providing more information to victims of abuse on risks associated with firearms victimization, and finally, suggestions for educating and training police and others who help abused women.

We have reviewed and condensed the many suggestions we received on how to improve the response of service providers, crisis workers, the police and the justice system to women experiencing abuse in farm and rural communities and small towns. The focus of our exploration was on the prevention of firearms victimization of women and children, as well as their pets and farm animals. Participants addressed a range of factors that they perceived to be associated with such victimization including the mental health problems of the abuser, particularly threats of suicide, and/or addictions. Our quantitative findings have reinforced and confirmed many of the beliefs. Participants also explored the cultural context in which family violence occurs in rural communities such as the dominant role of men and the stigma of being a victim. They commented on the need to challenge rural values around long guns that result in unsafe storage and misuse, as well as attitudes and values that are victim-blaming. Finally, participants discussed the role that community support, access to services

and government policies/legislation could play in supporting the help seeking behaviour of women and increasing their willingness to disclose family violence generally, and firearms victimization in particular.

While we have attempted to reflect areas of consensus with respect to solutions, it should be noted that sometimes the opinions on what should be done to address a particular aspect of firearms victimization varied. For example, some people felt that police and crisis workers must adopt a ‘zero tolerance of firearms’ policy that would result in the immediate search and seizure of firearms in any domestic case – even a routine “domestic argument”. Finding and removing all firearms in any domestic violence case was seen as the only remedy to end firearms victimization. Others felt that routine and automatic confiscation of firearms for every domestic call was impractical and would only contribute to the “code of secrecy” and drive the problem further “underground”. Instead, they argued, we should educate women about lethality risks and encourage them to disclose their fears of being harmed with firearms so that authorities can then take appropriate steps to remove the firearms. Those calling for confiscation argued that relying on women to disclose would bring us back full circle to the finding of this research - that women are afraid to disclose or that they normalize their fear in relation to firearms victimization. In the final analysis, although we have tried to carefully and respectfully weigh all of the suggestions, the co-principal investigators must take sole responsibility for the following recommendations. They are intended to stimulate discussion, exploration and debate.

## 6.1 Recommendations Relating to Firearms Victimization of Rural Women and Children

- **Ensure that risk assessment tools include questions about the misuse and abuse of firearms, as well as pet abuse.** Transition houses and victims services should include questions about firearms and firearms abuse on their intake forms and routine questionnaires. The presence of firearms may alter the assessment of the level of risk a woman's current situation poses. This information is also invaluable to police officers who may be called to intervene.

Some of the crisis workers and victim service workers, who participated in the survey and interviews, also participated in focus groups. We learned that many of them had not been asking abused women about animal abuse. They were amazed at the response to this question and they strongly recommended that it become a standard question on risk assessment tools and in-take forms. Questions about the presence of firearms should include questions on indirect victimization and on-going firearms abuse.

- **Support a series of gun safety commercials targetted at rural communities /provinces:** Several participants suggested that government create a series of commercials, similar to the drinking and driving commercials that focus on firearms risk. The commercials could cite statistics about the firearms death rate, and show how the improper storage, handling and general presence of firearms contributes to a high rate of firearms accidents, suicides and homicides – particularly domestic homicides in rural areas. This has a secondary benefit, as abused women in the survey expressed fear and concern when gun owners were not licensed, their firearms were not registered, and when their guns were not safely stored. Easily available firearms may make women more reluctant to speak out about domestic abuse, for fear of reprisals. Campaigning for compliance with laws on keeping guns under lock and key might help to re-assure these women, as well benefiting police officers involved in domestic-violence calls.

- **Publicize the family violence provisions of the *Firearms Act*:** Currently when a person applies for a firearms license, he/she must provide the name of any live-in spouse or common-law partner in the past two years. Although these persons are supposed to be notified about the application and given a toll free number to call if they have any concerns such as for their own safety, suicide, etc., participants in the qualitative part of the study felt that abused women would be too fearful to share their concerns. Many participants were not aware of the toll-free number. It was suggested that there be more education on the purpose of the toll-free line, who should call, what would happen, and so on. As well, participants felt that when the Chief Firearms Officer was conducting an investigation of an applicant or licensee, for any reason, that they use such opportunities to ask the partner a series of questions about direct and indirect firearm's victimization, destruction of property, concerns about suicide and threats to harm pets/farm animals. Rather than expecting a man's partner, especially a current partner, to speak out about abuse or share concerns about their partner's stability at the time of application, it may be more likely that important information could be obtained during an investigation that was triggered for other reasons.
- **Create pro-removal and pro-confiscation firearms policies similar to pro-arrest and pro-charge policies:** Participants were not unanimous in their recommendations about confiscating firearms in family violence cases. Nevertheless, they were unanimous in their belief that women's safety was paramount. Not surprisingly, almost all of the women we interviewed who had been victimized felt that guns should be automatically removed from the home at the first domestic violence call. It was suggested that *Criminal Code* be amended to allow the police to search for firearms *without a warrant* in all domestic disputes, even those where the incident itself did not involve a firearm. Some police officers interviewed felt that the current practice, which provides for an application to the Court for a preventative prohibition order when there are concerns that the firearm poses a risk to public safety, is sufficient. Such discretion allows for removal of firearms when an abused woman expresses fear related to the presence firearms.

However, service providers in this study felt that (1) the onus should be on the police to demonstrate that she is not fearful, (2) police must be better informed of what constitutes “risk”, and (3) the police must ask questions that reveal not only direct violations such as pointing the firearm, but also indirect threats to either kill her, family members, or a pet, and certainly threats to commit suicide. We therefore recommend that removal practices become more standardized in relation to police discretion to apply for a preventive protection order under Section 1.11 of the *Criminal Code*. The pro-removal policy would be based on establishing that the woman is not fearful, rather than requiring her to express fear. If such a policy is put in place, police would need the assurance of the Courts that their actions in removing firearms would pass judicial review and that the firearms would be confiscated. If firearms are returned, they should go back with safety locks, and a requirement for the owner to participate in a gun safety course. To better support police in their efforts to remove firearms, one participant recommended that NWEST be expanded and that additional RCMP experts be seconded to New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island (currently there are only two in each province) to give direct support to police officers.

- **Confiscate firearms for unsafe storage violations:** Confiscation is currently mandatory for certain offences and for various time periods. Participants in this study felt that firearms should also be seized and confiscated even when a person was charged with careless use or unsafe storage (Section 86 of the *Criminal Code*). This would send a message that when people who own guns do not follow the rules of safety, they are putting themselves and others at undo risk.
- **Educate police, justice officials, and service providers on the nature and extent of firearms victimization in rural homes:** The findings of this study demonstrate that a significant number of abused rural women are experiencing abuse with firearms, and that people in rural communities tend to normalize the presence of firearms and minimize the abuse. It is recommended that police, social workers, crisis workers and others who work with abused rural women, receive training

which would help them to understand and identify the nature of firearms victimization in abusive homes. The training would make the link to other factors that exacerbate risk when firearms are present such as alcohol/drug addictions, harming pets/farm animals, mental health problem including threatening suicide, and so on.

- **Encourage abused women to think about personal safety issues – explain risk.** When a woman is considering leaving an abusive relationship, and firearms are present, service providers and other support people (as well as friends and neighbors) must be able to encourage her to think about her safety and the safety of her children. This is especially true in rural communities where firearm ownership is prevalent. Does she know where the guns are stored and where he keeps the key to the gun cabinet? Are there guns hidden and are they kept loaded? Where is the ammunition? She should be encouraged to plan an escape route that takes into account the location of guns in the home. It should be explained to women that separation can be an extremely dangerous time, and that they must have a safety plan not only for living with and leaving abuse, but for living separately.
- **Restrict firearms access on stay-away and no-contact orders, and peace bonds in all domestic cases:** Participants strongly supported the inclusion of strict provisions to restrict firearms in domestic violence cases under such orders as emergency protection orders, peace bonds, or stay away orders and so on. It was pointed out that judges have in the past made arrangements for defendants under firearms restrictions to have their firearms available for hunting. In fact, a person charged with killing a police officer in Quebec last year was under a court ordered ban on owning firearms for ten years, but he had one returned by the Court for hunting season<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> CBC news reported that the man who killed Const. Valérie Gignac in Laval in 2005 was under a firearms ban. “François Pepin had been charged repeatedly with issuing death threats and harassing police officers and court workers. He was under a 10-year court order barring him from possessing firearms, the CBC's Amanda Pfeffer reports from Laval. Despite the ban, which dated back to 1999, he had asked for, and was granted,

- **Ensure follow up and support for victims following a charge and better enforcement of protective orders:** The women we interviewed felt that there was a need for much more communication from the police when a partner was charged and better follow up on breaches of peace bonds and protection orders, particularly where there is a fear of firearms victimization. Breaches must be taken seriously and result in immediate incarceration. Several interviewees spoke of their positive experiences with the police during a crisis, but they expressed considerable disappointment and dismay at their treatment in the months following. One woman summed up the frustration that we were told many women feel, when she declared, “I’ve probably said this 100 times already in your interview, but the victim seems to be the one punished”. We consistently heard that women found it difficult to get information, they had to talk to a different person each time and the police officers they dealt with seemed indifferent and frustrated with them for checking back. Participants described extremely positive experiences with victim services and we recommend that every effort be made to ensure their involvement in domestic violence cases.
- **Enact legislation to compel certain professionals (mental health and doctors) to report concerns about the stability of a gun owner:** Legislation has already been introduced in Quebec, where Bill 9 “*An Act respecting the safety of persons on certain premises and amending the Act respecting safety in sports*” requires professionals, such as physicians and teachers to report suspicious behavior even if it contradicts doctor-patient or any other confidentiality. Several participants encouraged us to recommend similar legislation in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Other professionals who might be covered under such legislation would be transition house crisis workers.

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permission to use a gun for hunting during the fall season.”  
<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2005/12/15/officer-shot.html>



## 6.2 Recommendations Relating to Abuse of Pets and Farm Animals

- **Create a Public Education Campaign:** The findings of this research demonstrate that abusing pets and farm animals to control and intimidate a spouse is a fairly common occurrence. Moreover, abused women often delay seeking help because of this. All participants agreed that an education and public awareness campaign – one that shared the findings of this study and encouraged people to show respect and sensitivity to victims of abuse who were concerned about their animals – would be helpful. This would include education about the risks associated with family violence and the presence of firearms, abuse of animals, and other factors uncovered in the research study.
- **Ensure that questions about pet/farm animal abuse are included on in-take forms and risk assessments:** Some of the crisis workers and victim service workers, who participated in the survey and interviews, also participated in focus groups. We learned that many of them had not been asking abused women about pet abuse previously. They were amazed at the response to this question and they strongly recommended that it become a standard question on risk assessment tools and in-take forms – not just harm to pets, but threats to harm or neglect pets, and farm animals as well.

I think this study, I know myself...that we were supposed to ask clients, y'know “Has he been abusive to any of the pets?” ...it was amazing to me, the questions that I wasn't asking and then you would get a response where they're saying “ Yeah, he threatened the cat,” or “He kicks the dog.”. .. It was surprising to me, because I probably wasn't asking the question before unless it was obvious.

- **Develop a safe haven program for pets and farm animals:** When discussing solutions and strategies for helping abused rural women with pets, the participants suggested that communities set up safe shelters for animals of abused women – places where woman and children could maintain contact with the animals until they could recover their animals. As one woman suggested,

There needs to be a spot where you can say ok I need to take my cat for awhile I'm in an abusive place. I need you to take them and they take them for awhile and you

can go back and get them. A place that you can leave your cats there, leave your information and everything, and you don't have to pay, because a lot of women that are in abuse don't have money.

It was suggested that veterinarians offer free care such as inoculations to assist in making the program viable. In the case of larger animals, foster farms might be needed. In order to establish consistent and appropriate responses throughout the two provinces, it was suggested that a working group be established of researchers, veterinarians, animal welfare workers, SPCA staff, transition house workers, and even Kindness Club, to explore possibilities and establish an actual "safe shelter program". (A discussion of some of the legal issues associated with establishing safe haven programs is included in Appendix Y.)

- **Provide stronger legal protections for the animals of victims of domestic violence.** Participants noted that the connection between family violence and animal abuse should be recognized in our laws. In our focus group, we learned that police were including pets in Emergency Protection Orders in Prince Edward Island; however, there was little enforcement of a new provincial law, *Companion Animal Protection Act*, because the police and the public were not aware of it. This suggests that legislative protections are no guarantee unless there is an active education and training component to ensure enforcement. Those who are concerned about legislative protections should familiarize themselves with provincial laws and with the animal cruelty Bills currently before parliament and support those groups that have backed this legislative reform. Similarly, we suggest reviewing recent legislation in Maine - the first piece of legislation of its kind in the U.S.A - which gives judges the explicit power to grant protective orders for animals in domestic violence cases. This legislation developed out of a state bar program regarding the connection between domestic/child abuse and animal abuse. Other states are now considering legislation. New Brunswick does not have emergency protection legislation, and it is unclear whether the no-contact provisions of other protective orders could include "staying away from the pet" provisions. Such a practice

would be an important step, both in protecting domestic violence victims and in protecting animals.

- **Award “custody” of pets to the victim.** Since pets are seen as marital property, police have been reluctant to make decisions about taking a pet away from an abusive man who refuses to let it go. The recommendation above could solve this problem. However, it also has been suggested that the courts could make better use of “exclusive possession” provisions in marital property law to ensure victims of abuse get the pets (and the children!).
- **Link animal abuse and to other forms of abuse - child abuse and senior abuse:** Several participants noted that “where pets are being abused, people will be next”. Several people suggested that animal welfare authorities and child protection authorities should not be working under mutually exclusive laws. Rather, in order to ensure coordination, governments should amend child protection legislation to require animal welfare officers, and others who suspect animal abuse, to report their concerns to child welfare authorities as a possible form of child abuse and/or family violence. Prince Edward Island has already included this in their laws. As well, we were told that in light of the demographic profile of our population, and baby boomers moving into retirement, we must be mindful of the control and intimidation of elderly persons using pets or firearms may be a continuation of abuse across the life span. In fact several participants noted cases of older women whose pets were abused by their partners, but because they no longer had children at home, they were not eligible for particular programs and services geared towards women with children. Even accessing domestic legal aid was difficult for older women without children.

### 6.3 Recommendations Relating to General Public Education

- **Develop public education initiatives on the different faces of family violence:** Participants in this study suggested that service providers, government and others work together to develop a three-pronged general public education strategy - for abused women (with an emphasis on rural women), for the community, and for the professionals with whom they come into contact. How do abusive behaviours manifest themselves, create fear, and contribute to risk; and how do we minimize them? An education campaign would encourage abused women to recognize the risk of personal harm, and would help others to identify the nature and forms of firearms victimization in homes experiencing family violence. The campaign should also promote safety planning strategies that address firearms risk and victimization. We must also make the link to other factors that are correlated with greater degrees of fear and possibly higher risks of lethal outcomes in homes with firearms. These factors include, for example, alcohol/drug addictions, abuse of animals, and mental health problems including threatening to commit suicide.

In rural communities, we were told, this should definitely include education about pet abuse and firearms victimization – though we should not describe people as "victims" since this generates a negative stereotype. Almost everyone emphasized the importance of reaching “youth” and providing public awareness in schools and other places that would target the younger generation. Clearly, public education campaigns are not a panacea – but they do help.

I don't think that you can ever get rid of it, only because, there are certain people that are always going to be that way and you can't reach them, I mean, how do you make [an abusive man] feel compassion, feel concerned and caring? So we can't stop it, there's no way of stopping it. The only thing we can do is see our children are more educated.

It is important that public education messages not use vague terms. They should identify specific actions, like shooting a spouse's beloved pet, and label them for what they are - mechanisms of control and intimidation that terrorize women and children and put them at risk of serious harm. Since women often turn to family,

friends, neighbours and others in the community for help, rather than the police, we must encourage everyone to part of the solutions. Whether it is pet abuse, woman abuse, senior abuse, or child abuse, we were told that people must be encouraged to speak out and challenge the hurtful behaviours. One interviewee, who had left an abusive relationship because her partner was abusing her pets, said people should speak out and report all forms of abuse. She put it this way:

If I see somebody out there that's abusing a dog, I won't hesitate to go up to them and say something. And I know that a lot of them are wanting to really hit me. I've had some say, 'who the hell do you think you are?' But that's an animal, he's living, breathing - you don't hurt it.

- **Create safe environments where women feel safe to disclose abuse:** In rural communities, particularly for farm women, taking shelter from abuse can mean abandoning a “way of life” and moving to the city. Participants discussed whether there was a need for more transition houses. Some felt that rural women are reluctant to leave their communities and travel to a transition house. They mentioned that there are some “unofficial” safe houses that are known by word of mouth, where a woman can go when she needs to escape abuse. They recommended that government support the creation of a network of safe places, which could be located in work places, social service offices, faith communities, hospitals or any place a woman would feel safe. Some suggested the need to create local “women’s centres” that could assist women with a number of related issues not just abuse. Staff or volunteers of these centres could help with employment counselling, finding housing, getting domestic legal aid, and letting women know that they are not alone. Such safe environments could act as a hub for “outreach activities” and could offer programs to increase women’s self esteem as well. This safe and caring atmosphere would promote disclosure and ensure appropriate referrals and responses. Women must have a private place away from their partners to reflect on their concerns, obtain information and explore options.
  
- **Coordinate services and improve communication among all service providers.** Almost everyone interviewed spoke of the frustration that they felt when they disclosed abuse and found themselves going from one agency to the next, telling

and retelling their story. Many found the process so difficult they spoke of returning to the abuse. When an abused rural woman asks for help, she may have to make great efforts to position herself to get that help. In rural areas there is generally no public transit, and many women do not have the financial resources to take a taxi in order to make multiple trips to town get access services. A greater coordination of services in support of women leaving abusive relationships would help. Such access might be facilitated by offering a toll-free crisis hot line that is widely advertised or rural outreach centres staffed with travelling, well-trained resource persons. Inter-agency collaboration is important in order to offer abused rural women an array of support wherever she turns for help, which should include both practical and legal suggestions to address safety issues.

- **Raise her confidence and self-esteem.** We repeatedly heard that abused women begin to blame themselves for the abuse, and that they often lack the self esteem to consider themselves worth caring about. Some abused women cared more about the harm to their pets than to themselves. It is important that service providers encourage survivors not to blame themselves and that they take time to validate her suffering.

## 6.4 Recommendations Relating to Risk Assessment Tools

- **Coordinate risk assessment tools to ensure that they incorporate research evidence-based risks such as abuse of pets, indirect fears of firearms, etc.:** Participants expressed concern that our risk assessment tools do not always guarantee that professionals end up identifying the same high risks. One participant explained that:

We need to be talking about the same things. I may be looking at one situation going ‘wow’, and a police officer may be going to the door and saying, well he didn’t do anything criminal.

Although some service providers in this study already asked about pet abuse, others did not. Some asked about firearms in the home, but not about firearms kept elsewhere. People did not ask abused women about their fears relating to easy access to firearms, nor did they explore the nature of indirect fear and intimidation. In our focus groups, people suggested that the findings of this current study be incorporated into all risk assessments tools – particularly those used in rural provinces. They felt that professionals conducting assessments should be trained to understand the impact of cultural factors on decision-making and to account for such factors when attempting to assess greater levels of fear and increased risk. In addition, we have found that women in common-law relationships are over-represented as victims of abuse in this study which is something that is noteworthy. Clearly, not all common-law partners are abusive, just as not all firearms owners abuse their partners, yet the strong association with increased risk in relation to other risk factors is important to recognize.

## SECTION 7 – CONCLUSION

The findings from this study clearly provide us with a better understanding of the extent and nature of firearms victimization in rural homes that are experiencing family violence. The study makes a significant contribution to family violence research by demonstrating that cultural factors play a critical role in understanding the nature of, and response to, firearms victimization. The study shows that the normalization of firearms in rural homes in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island has led to the minimization of firearms abuse, including in instances where women, children and pets/farm animals are the victims. Similar to our earlier research on family violence in farm and rural communities, we discovered that ‘rural culture’ tends to foster conservative and traditional family values that support more rigid gender role stereotyping and a tendency to blame the victim for domestic turmoil. As well, community norms around privacy and protecting the ‘family name’ of the abuser act as strong disincentives’ to disclosure. Such values provide the framework for understanding and responding to rural women’s reluctance and/or failure to disclose abuse generally, and firearms victimization in particular.

Another significant aspect of rural culture that we identified in our research was the “gun culture” or “hunting culture”. As mentioned above, the resulting widely shared set of values fosters attitudes that normalize the presence of firearms, and minimize firearms misuse such as improper storage because people believe that long guns are intended for “peaceful” purposes. Many rural households own guns and in most families there are few concerns about firearms. The situation, however, is somewhat different in rural homes experiencing family violence. Our data demonstrate that the presence of firearms in these cases contributed to a climate of fear and intimidation experienced by women and children, particularly when the firearms were not licensed, not kept in a locked facility and/or were kept loaded. Other factors, such as the abuser’s threats to harm her or others or commit suicide, especially in cases where the abuser used alcohol or drugs, further increased her fear when firearms were present.

The qualitative and quantitative data was further enhanced by the literature review, which helped us to connect our findings to other studies that looked at family violence



firearms victimization, and/or the experience of abused rural women. Our media analysis examined the presentation of family violence situations in newspaper articles. The analysis demonstrated that, just as people in rural “community” tend to minimize abuse, even firearms victimization, and make excuses for the abuser, the media may also reflect this attitude. In this media analysis we uncovered some important reoccurring themes about the ways in which domestic violence is portrayed. We found, for example, that many articles on family violence suggested that the violence or abusive behaviour was caused by addictions or mental health issues – a notion that must be challenged by understanding that the association of such variable to violence is not causal<sup>36</sup>. These and other themes investigated in the media analysis provide us with a foundation by which to better understand the issue of domestic abuse as it is understood in a broader social context.

Our case law review has enabled us to review some of the common factors that Courts consider in family violence cases. In fact, we learned that Courts often make this same erroneous link – attributing the crime to the addictions or the mental health problems in a one-to-one correspondence. These same attributes and characteristics of the abuser are often identified by the Courts as mitigating or aggravating factors, such as addictions, remorse, and past history of violence, and addressed at sentencing. This is of interest since we can compare them to the findings of our own study which deal with similar factors. In light of our findings, it is apparent that simple fixes such as “anger management” are not necessarily the answer to abusive behaviour as we must address the abuse within its broader social and cultural context as well.

We also demonstrated that the prevalence of pets and farm animals in rural homes may provide an abusive partner with yet another tool for control and domination. The perception, if not the actual risk of harm, tends to be exacerbated (particularly in homes with firearms) when the abuser suffers from drug and alcohol addictions, or from mental health issues, such as depression and threats of suicide. While these are factors that could be faced by any abused women, rural women must respond to their situation and overcome certain

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<sup>36</sup> While many of the abused women in the study spoke of a heightened fear at times when their partners were drinking or taking drugs, one woman told us that if her partner came home on a Friday night and was not drunk, she worried that he would become violent since he “mellowed out” when he was intoxicated. It is important to demonstrate that although firearms victimization often escalates as inhibitions are lowered during the consumption of alcohol or drugs; we must be careful not to infer a causal association. As one woman in our study revealed, when the Court sent her husband who had brutally beaten her to detoxification and observation for 60 days, “he just became meaner and meaner the more sober he got.”

unique barriers that are more commonly found in rural communities such as lack of privacy, collective values and consensus around women's role as subservient to the head of the household, threats to abuse or neglect pets and farm animals, and pressure from family not to involve the police. As a result, the remedies that survivors have suggested for improving community response and increasing the safety of women, children and pets exposed to domestic abuse and firearms victimization reflect the rural context and the culture of firearms in which the abuse is occurring.

Many people made suggestions about the need to ensure stronger authority for police to confiscate firearms in domestic violence situations and better legal protections for the animals of victims of domestic violence. They felt that police needed more discretion in taking guns out of abusive homes and that, once removed, those firearms should be confiscated. They also suggested that transition house staff, physicians and other service providers who work with abused women should be asking their clients more questions about the presence of firearms, standardizing their risk assessment tools, and sharing high risk concerns with the police. Participants also felt that laws should be introduced or strengthened around the abuse of animals in a family violence context and that communities should create safe shelters for animals of abused women; places where women and children could maintain contact with their animals until they could recover them. Many of these recommendations are consistent with what we heard in our earlier research (Hornosty & Doherty, 2004; Doherty & Hornosty, 2004; Hornosty & Doherty, 2003).

Almost all of the participants in the current study commented on the need for developing public awareness campaigns on firearms safety – but in the context of the rural gun culture in order to remove the stigma of disclosure. This could be done much as the anti-drinking and driving campaigns were years ago. Participants also agreed that government policy makers need to develop a coordinated, comprehensive strategy – one that also addresses systemic barriers such as employment, transportation and access to services.

The recommendations that participants shared with us for addressing firearms victimization and improving the safety of women and children in rural homes, as well as for those who work with them, varied considerably reflecting the various perspectives of

victims, police, justice officials, crisis workers, service providers or community members. This report has attempted to explore the range of potential actions and strategies. While these strategies may have applicability in other rural communities across Canada, we suggest that firearms victimization of abused women in urban areas and large cities may be quite different, both in the nature of the victimization and victim response. We believe that it is important, and we strongly recommend, that the Canada Firearms Centre consider supporting the following three initiatives:

- 1) **Sponsor a “Family Violence and Firearms in Rural Communities” forum of experts and stakeholders from across Canada:** The purpose of this conference would be two-fold: It could serve as a vehicle to present the findings and recommendations coming out of the study, as well as serving as a catalyst to launch a coordinated discussion between interested parties. The conference could be structured as a “fishbowl” forum, where stakeholders, policy makers, police, and service providers would listen to “experts” discussing various proposed solutions. This forum could then be followed by smaller topical discussion groups and subsequent plenary report backs. The goal would be to explore the pros and cons of various responses in rural communities across Canada, and to identify regional research sites to replicate this research across Canada in both urban and rural areas.
  
- 2) **Replicate the research study in rural, urban and remote “regions” across Canada:** This study has been invaluable in demonstrating that although firearms victimization in domestic violence situations reflects the trauma and experience of individual women, it happens within lived realities that are influenced by social and cultural factors. This cultural reality creates the shared values and norms of a group of people – norms that influence perceptions of fear and risk, underlie attitudes about firearms, impact on the help seeking behaviour of abused women, and impact on the response of the community’s (as well as the police, courts and media) and possible solutions. We must understand and identify family violence and firearms victimization across Canada in a similar way since the meaning that people give to situations is shaped by their identities and experiences.

- 3) **Work collaboratively with the researchers, their partners and stakeholders in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, to create a communication strategy about the findings and possible solutions:** The ultimate goal of the research is to ensure that the findings are widely available in both English and French to everyone who is a stakeholder in reducing family violence firearms victimization in their communities. In order to reach everyone, the findings should be translated into colourful brochures, much like the information brochures use in the research, and the most salient information about risks of victimization and ways to enhance safety should be put into easy to read, plain language points.

In conclusion, this study fills a gap in research on how the presence of firearms in rural areas affects abused women, their children and pets, and many others in their community. It provides the necessary information for championing better-informed intervention strategies and response options for service delivery agents who respond to family violence, particular in a rural context. The study presents opportunities for cooperation, collaboration and partnerships between the Canada Firearms Centre, service delivery agencies, and academic institutions, as well as encouraging a measure of community input, involvement and “ownership” of meaningful solutions to firearms problems. Dissemination of the findings will be a critical component of the success of this study, followed by research in other regions with a view to mapping the social and cultural factors that are associated with firearms victim identification and assessment of lethality of threats in homes experiencing family violence everywhere in Canada.

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