

Rural Communities

2023 Ohio CASA Celebrate Kids!

Obstacles of Trauma

- ▶ Families can experience various forms of trauma (i.e., sexual assault or poverty). In this presentation, we will be discussing Rural Poverty issues through the lens of domestic violence. Cultural differences, obstacles and barriers discussed today apply to almost every trauma.

Learning Objective

- ▶ By the end of this session, participants will understand the unique challenges for survivors of family violence living in rural communities. Additionally, CASAs/GALs will be equipped to permeate the “curtain of isolation” often associated with rural living to understand the dynamics of the home.

Additional Training Goals

- ▶ Participants will be able to identify:
 - ▶ How aspects of small, close-knit communities may interfere with survivors' privacy and confidentiality
 - ▶ How social isolation (technologically or geographically) and fewer services that require transportation may impede help-seeking, accessing services, and documentation of incidence.
 - ▶ How isolation, close-knit communities, and powerful family relationships can insulate the abusing party from accountability and/or pressure a survivor to refrain from seeking services.
 - ▶ How to assess families when there may be allegations of DV but a lack of reports or supporting information from collateral contacts due to coercive control, trauma, and barriers to service.

Characteristics of Rural Communities

- ▶ Limited access to support services for survivors
- ▶ Geographical distance and isolation
- ▶ Small close-knit communities
- ▶ Powerful family relationships
- ▶ Cultural values
- ▶ Stigma of abuse

Limited access to support services for survivors

- ▶ Lack of shelters or transitional housing
 - ▶ Some survivors are hesitant to go into shelter out of fears that the child would rather be at home with the offender if they still have their amenities
 - ▶ Some CASAs/GALs treat a survivor in shelter as being less stable without taking into account safety concerns and planning for the future
- ▶ Less and more spread-out law enforcement
 - ▶ Offenders may have left the scene by the time an officer arrives and the agencies may lack resources for increased patrols around a residence
 - ▶ Response time in rural communities can be much longer and can lead to survivor's not reporting or following through with charges
- ▶ Access to courts
 - ▶ Many survivors cannot get to court due to lack of transportation, gas funds, or affordable childcare
 - ▶ Lack of funds to hire private counsel and lack of available legal aid, pro se, or VOCA funded attorneys
- ▶ Lack of specialized services for survivors of domestic violence
 - ▶ Lack of trauma informed services, counseling, and advocacy

Geographical Distance and Isolation

▶ Geographical Distance

- ▶ Lack of transportation can impede help-seeking or accessing services
- ▶ Greater distances between homes means that survivors are less visible to neighbors and potential witnesses
- ▶ Survivors are further away from emergency services
- ▶ Physical and social isolation contribute to an increase of power and control by the offender
- ▶ Survivors are often estranged from their families

▶ Technology

- ▶ Lack of reliable internet or cellular services
- ▶ Often offenders take a victim's phone, preventing her from safely documenting injuries and/or seeking assistance
- ▶ Documenting injuries can increase the potential danger to a survivor
 - ▶ Images save to a cloud
 - ▶ Offenders often take and go through a client's phone, including emails and texts

Small, Close-knit Communities

- ▶ Lack of privacy and confidentiality
 - ▶ Some small communities and towns have Facebook pages where the members of the community discuss and repost criminal arrests and civil filings
- ▶ A lack of anonymity because everyone knows everyone and a perceived lack of trust
 - ▶ It is likely that a survivor and/or offender know the law enforcement officers or health care providers who would respond
 - ▶ Vehicles are more readily recognized and victims have difficulty safely seeking out treatment or services with anonymity
- ▶ In smaller communities, a lack of attorneys can lead to an offender creating conflicts with available local counsel

Powerful family relationships

- ▶ Family connections with people in positions of authority
 - ▶ Law enforcement
 - ▶ Survivors may not report because they believe that because an offender is friends with members of law enforcement, that the offender will not be arrested or charged and will lead to further violence in retaliation
 - ▶ Prosecutors and judges
 - ▶ Family members may control assets and resources
- ▶ Pressuring a survivor to refrain from reporting or seeking services
 - ▶ Families will often put pressure on a survivor by promising that they will make the offender seek treatment or by making them feel guilty
 - ▶ “He/She will lose their job if they are convicted”
 - ▶ “Do you really want your child to grow up without a father/mother?”
 - ▶ Threatened consequences (housing, vehicle use, child care, utilities)
- ▶ Insulation of the abusing party from accountability
 - ▶ Offender’s family members will often pay bail, legal fees
 - ▶ Stalking of survivor by family members

Cultural Values

- ▶ Religion and the permanence of marriage
 - ▶ Anyone seeking to leave a marriage can be ostracized or cut off from their support network
 - ▶ Survivor can be ostracized from their faith base if they attempt to leave an abusive marriage
- ▶ Patriarchal attitudes
 - ▶ Women are more frequently full-time care givers for children and lack access to, or knowledge of, family finances
 - ▶ More common attitude that men have the “final say” in decisions and family matters
 - ▶ Regardless of marital status, survivors often deal with these attitudes from law enforcement, the abuser, and the community
- ▶ Importance of privacy and “keeping problems within the home”

Stigma of Abuse

- ▶ Many survivors think that an admission of abuse is an admission of failure
- ▶ Survivors are often embarrassed that anyone would know that they are in, or have stayed in, an abusive relationship
- ▶ There is still a stigma associated with being a single parent

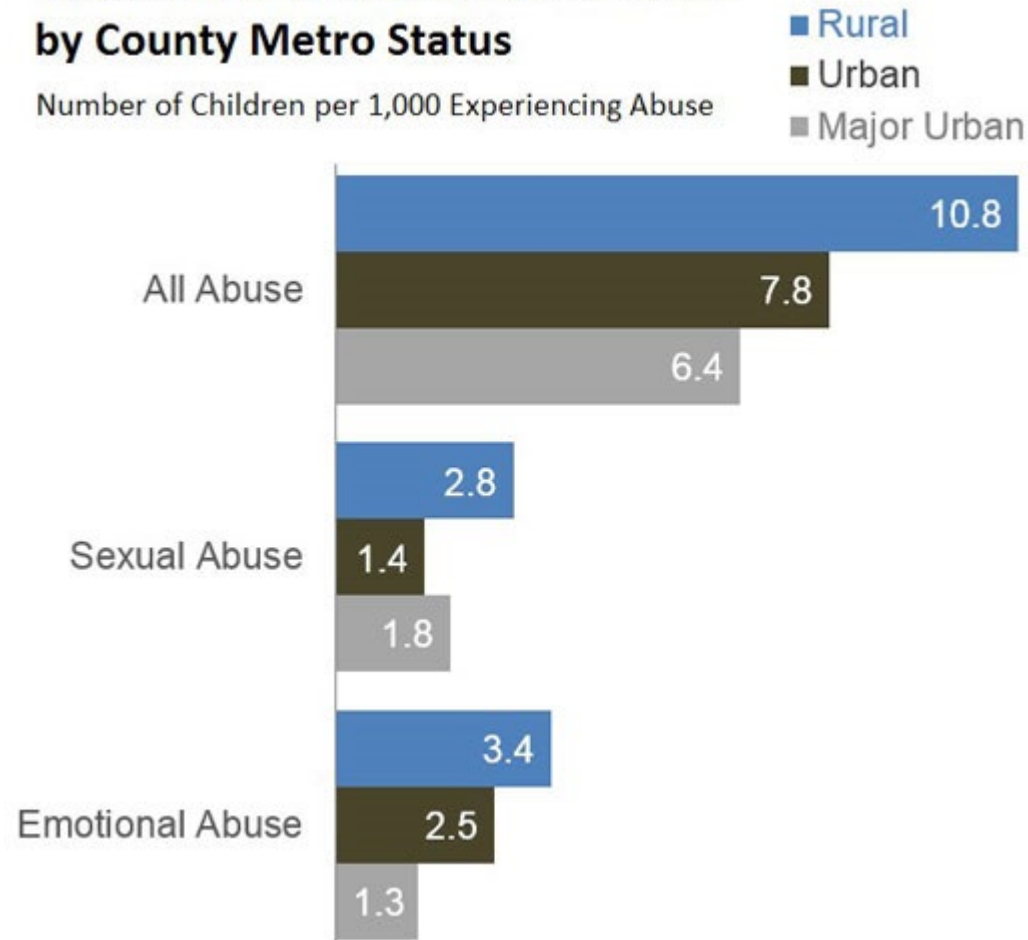
Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

- ▶ “The use of physical violence, sexual violence, threats of physical or sexual violence, stalking and psychological aggression (including coercive tactics) by a current or former intimate partner”
 - ▶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012), *Understanding Intimate Partner Violence* (2012).
- ▶ IPV is more expansive than traditional criminal domestic violence charges
- ▶ Examples of IPV beyond the traditional definition
 - ▶ Financial exploitation
 - ▶ Psychological abuse
 - ▶ Isolation

Prevalence of IPV in Rural Communities

Incidence of Harm Standard Abuse by County Metro Status

Number of Children per 1,000 Experiencing Abuse



► Source: [Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect \(NIS-4\)](#), Administration for Children & Families, 2010

Trends with IPV in Rural Communities

- ▶ Perpetrators within rural setting engage in more chronic and severe DV and have higher rates of substance abuse and unemployment than perpetrators in urban settings.
- ▶ Victims of DV in rural settings also differentiate from victims in urban settings in that they experience worse psychosocial and physical health outcomes.
- ▶ Violence based upon sexual orientation and gender identity remains a huge concern with a higher rate of bullying and assault than urban areas.

Journal of Family Violence. (January, 2021) *Challenges in Risk Assessment with Rural Domestic Violence Victims: Implications for Practice*

Common Issues in Rural Communities

▶ Firearms

- ▶ Firearms are more accepted and assessible
- ▶ Issues related to the forfeiture of firearms with protection orders or DV charges

▶ Access to Utilities

▶ Children are often more self-reliant

- ▶ Get themselves ready and to school in the mornings or cook for themselves

▶ Babysitting

- ▶ Family members of the offender are often caregivers for minor children
- ▶ Children often babysit siblings at a younger age as there are less affordable and available daycare options in rural communities

Common Issues in Rural Communities

- ▶ Sharing rooms or beds with siblings
 - ▶ Privacy vs. Practicality
- ▶ Substandard housing
 - ▶ Lack of code enforcement
 - ▶ Month-to-month tenancies
 - ▶ Manufactured homes - less assistance available for rehabilitation
- ▶ Chores
 - ▶ The types of chores for children in rural communities may be different or more complicated
 - ▶ Children's attitudes can be impacted by a parent who does not require them to do chores or assist with housework
- ▶ Extra-curricular activities
 - ▶ Can be limited by finances and distance
- ▶ Employment opportunities
 - ▶ Transportation, lack of skills, education, and trauma

Tips for Assessing Domestic Violence

- ▶ Do not expect that there will always be reports or documentation of injuries
 - ▶ Law enforcement practices may make it difficult for survivors to safely report
 - ▶ If agencies fail to take action, survivors believe that there is no benefit and stop reporting.
 - ▶ In Allen County, a survivor is often told to go to the prosecutor's office the next day with a copy of the report and ask them to press charges without an offender being arrested.
 - ▶ If there are reports, look for those actions of the offender that would make it difficult for a survivor to have documentation (i.e. does the offender take the survivor's phone to stop her from calling for help or take keys). Additionally, if an offender is taking the phone or in charge of the phone plan, it may not be safe for a survivor to document her injuries.

Tips for Assessing Domestic Violence

- ▶ If a survivor needs medical treatment, a medical report can substantiate that an injury occurred
 - ▶ Do not be surprised if the survivor is untruthful about how the injury occurred, especially if the offender is present or has the minor children when the survivor is seeking medical care
- ▶ Dismissal of charges or requesting the dismissal of a no contact order do not mean that no violence has occurred
 - ▶ Remember that the officer needed probable cause to make an arrest and that the report (and any photos) should be reviewed
 - ▶ Also, many of the reasons listed in previous slides can influence a survivor to try and terminate any pending charges or litigation
- ▶ It is not uncommon for a survivor to stay in an abusive situation or in contact with the abuser to protect the children or themselves
- ▶ Manipulation of the children

Tips for Assessing Domestic Violence

- ▶ Talk to the children in an environment where they can feel safe disclosing
 - ▶ Do not ask them questions about the domestic violence when the alleged perpetrator is in the home
 - ▶ Speaking to the children separately can also be effective
- ▶ Separate your feelings about poverty-related issues
- ▶ How to talk to people within rural communities
 - ▶ Be mindful of the language that you use
 - ▶ Repeat back
- ▶ Impact of Trauma
 - ▶ Remember that trauma can impact a survivor's ability to save and retrieve traumatic memories
- ▶ Drug and alcohol history
- ▶ Isolation of survivor
- ▶ Psychological abuse

Questions?



Katherine S. O'Malley

Senior Attorney

545 W. Market Street, Suite 301

Lima, Ohio 45801

Phone: 419-930-2438

Fax: 419-782-5830

komalley@lawolaw.org



Robin A. Bozian

Retired Project Attorney Southeastern Ohio

Legal Services

Current Contract Trainer for Ohio

Domestic Violence Network

749 Ellis Run Road

Cutler, Ohio 45724

Phone: 740-448-7228

robin@bozian.com