

Rural areas and sexual assault essays example

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



Following the American Psychological Association's Guidelines

Sexual assault, harassment, and rape are unfortunate occurrences that happen in the daily lives of many individuals across the world. Though it is an atrocity that nobody should be forced to endure, it is even more unfortunate that some are at a further disadvantage than others are. Those who live in rural areas, primarily women, are not only more likely to face sexual assault or harassment in their lifetime, but they are less likely to seek services or have services rendered to them to deal with the catastrophe.

Rural areas are difficult to access, and for numerous reasons victims do not seek help or cannot seek help, often due to geographic, economic, and social barriers. This makes the job of human services professionals difficult when it comes to giving victims the resources needed. Despite these difficulties, human service workers are still fighting against stereotypes and prejudice in order to allow victims to feel more comfortable about coming forward when sexual assault occurs.

Occupants of rural areas, as mentioned, have the most difficult time accessing resources after sexual assault. Several variants constitute what is rural. For example, Alexandra Neame and Melanie Heenan state it is a place often confused with a romanticized version of itself, which is the primary problem with sexual assault being a frequent occurrence. Many believe rural is equated with a small community that is naturally bonded and caring for one another. In reality, rural communities are defined as any community located at least 100 kilometers away from a major city; they are geographically isolated, the families typically have a low-income rate, a

small population, and very few services to offer . Susan H. Lewis gives the apt analysis. Imagine 80 percent of the population smashed together on 20 percent of the land, while the remaining 20 percent of the population are sparsely populated over the 80 percent of the land that is left. The 20 percent of the population lingering over 80 percent of the land would constitute the rural population . The rural population is often confined, removed from society, finds it difficult to get to civilization, and are sometimes so removed that they are not even included in census data, making an exact population number impossible to retrieve. Unfortunately, these factors also make it almost impossible to render services when needed.

Many outstanding barriers come between the rural community or the victim and the human services worker when a crime like sexual assault is committed. For example, economics plays a part in blocking services. According to, “ Responding to Sexual Assault in Rural Communities,” it is statistical that women who live in rural, agricultural areas will have less access to support services because most of these services are rendered in town. Research also suggests that women living in rural areas are economical worse off than women living in Metropolitan areas, and that this can impact their ability to leave or to report abuse of any kind by a rate of 60 percent. It is assumed that so many women do not leave, or return to violent situations because there are fewer employment opportunities and because there are so few services in place to help them remove themselves from a harmful situation in a safe manner . Essentially, there is no money available for the woman to leave a rural area to save herself and, despite being

abused, they may become dependent on their abuser.

Another barrier preventing human service workers from helping victims social. There are many social stigmas and fear surrounding the victims of sexual assault. While the romanticized idea of a rural community is that everybody is caring and close, the reality is that everybody knows one another and their business. Sociologists call it "acquaintanceship density." Therefore, there is no anonymity. Even when services are available, many women do not come forward based on the fact that they will be exposed as a victim. Even if the victim attempts to make a report at a local police station, simply parking her car will make her immediately recognizable because there will not be that many cars to recognize. Coupled with this physical isolation and lack of anonymity is the distrust of outside help, even if it is offered and can help. Strangers are often not welcome at first because in small communities, organizations are new and intrusive; it is difficult for locals to trust them. Though they are only trying to help, it can take time for women to seek help in these situations not only for fear of losing their anonymity and being labeled as assaulted, but for fraternizing with who everybody believes is the enemy .

With so many barriers blocking the way, it can be difficult for human services workers to gain access to victims in order to help them. Strategies are in place to help public officials circumvent these issues, however. For example, one of the greatest barriers is the geography of rural communities. In order to help this, "Unspoken Crimes: Sexual Assault in Rural America," suggests community visits, as well as outreach and awareness. All three combined allow public officials to visit the area and make their presence known several

times a year, which prevents geography from being such an issue. Visiting several times a year, despite the cost to the public officials, cuts back on the economic barrier that often stops victims from coming forward; if human services workers are visiting often, victims do not need to figure out how to get to a larger city to seek services. Visiting to promote awareness also teaches the community about the perils of sexual assault which helps eliminate the stigmas attached to the act. While it may be impossible to keep everything 100 percent anonymous (eventually somebody will recognize a car or a person exiting a building), awareness can help ensure that there is less judgment surrounding individuals who are recognized. Finally, visiting communities more often also helps build strong, trusting bonds among community members, which helps the rural community think of the workers less as outsiders and more as a resource that can be used to help. As a human services professional I would make it one of my priorities to visit rural areas as often as possible, spreading awareness of what it means to be a victim of sexual assault, while building strong and trusting relationships with the citizens in order to let them know I was a person they could turn to. In closing, unfortunately many barriers hinder human services workers from helping those in rural areas. Geography is not on the side of the human services professional, and it prevents many reports from being made each year. Economic factors and social stigmas also hinder the process of reporting and healing, as well as rendering services. Fortunately, if human services workers are willing, it is possible to begin changing these circumstances by visiting rural areas. Together we could teach the citizens that being a victim is not shameful, and that being an outside organization

does not mean we cannot be trusted. We are there to help. Slowly, we can begin to change how victims feel and, by making ourselves available, we can bypass all barriers in our way in order to help those who need us.

References

Lewis, S. H. (2003). Unspoken Crimes: Sexual Assault in Rural America.

National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 1-22.

Neame, A., & Heenan, M. (2004). Responding to Sexual Assault in Rural

Communities. Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, 1-24.