

Rural women delay seeking help for domestic violence

November 23 2017

As White Ribbon Day approaches, a study of Australian women in regional, rural and remote locations has shown they tend to experience longer periods of domestic violence than city women before accessing support services.

The qualitative study of country women's experience of [violence](#) in their [intimate relationships](#) highlights this link to their geographical isolation when it comes to how they cope with domestic and family violence.

The study also found that men from regional, rural and remote locations who used violence in their intimate relationships were usually only offered a legal response.

"Services like counselling or group work, which are offered in urban areas, isn't available because of population size and anonymity issues, so support for men is limited," says lead researcher Professor Wendt, from Flinders University's College of Education, Psychology and Social Work.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women or White Ribbon Day, marked on 25 November this year, draws attention to the issue of preventing men's violence against women and gender equality and asks the community to engage and help to stop violence towards woman.

Women from rural South Australia and Western Australia participated in

the Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) study led by Professor Wendt.

Professor Wendt's paper, Seeking help for domestic and family violence: exploring regional, rural, and remote women's coping experiences, was published in the ANROWS Horizon Research [report](#).

The project used a qualitative research design to gain insights into women's help-seeking behaviour and coping mechanisms.

Professor Wendt says many women who participated in the study didn't view distance as a barrier to accessing services, instead relying on friends and relatives for support.

"Women from remote or regional share similar experiences to all women who face this issue, but they cope alone for long periods. Often a crisis is the catalyst for seeking help," Professor Wendt says.

The study also found that strategies for seeking help were often influenced by their network of friends and family outside of the home, with differences in the way Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women experienced domestic and [family violence](#).

Aboriginal women mostly described having strong family networks and support, but most non-Aboriginal women had limited [family](#) networks so were more likely to seek support from friends and acquaintances.

In some cases the absence of informal networks means some [women](#) did not reach out for help at all.

The study also examined how workforce, resources affect service provision in rural and remote regions. Professor Wendt says workers were often impacted by their geographical location.

"Domestic violence workers are often working in crisis mode due to limitations and lack of resources; preventative or other work is harder because of this. Workers felt the geographical isolation, rather than social isolation, negatively affected their wellbeing," Professor Wendt says.

White Ribbon Day will be marked by Flinders University with a light display on its Tonsley building at Clovelly Park.

Provided by Flinders University

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