

**SEPARATION/DIVORCE SEXUAL ASSAULT IN RURAL OHIO:
SURVIVORS' PERCEPTIONS OF COLLECTIVE EFFICACY***

By

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SEPARATION/DIVORCE SEXUAL ASSAULT IN RURAL OHIO:

SURVIVORS' PERCEPTIONS OF COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

A lot of times people don't like stepping in, so we never get company, knowing that you have a violent husband. I didn't have a car. I wasn't allowed to go anywhere. But here is our neighbors out here, seeing this man beat this female off the swing set, beating her with his fist, kicking her with his feet, grabbing her by the hair of her head, smearing her face and what...you're gonna stand up there and aren't gonna call the law? Or you are gonna stand up there and you aren't gonna come down? And they was outside standing and he was just thumping me so hard, so hard. And nobody called the law. Nobody did. Nobody came down to yank him off me. Nobody did anything. But, the worst of all was how my kids seen it all. And, that is what is really sad (Mary, a rural Ohio interviewee).¹

Many people assume that crimes seldom, if ever, occur in rural U.S. communities (Weisheit, Falcone, & Wells, 1996), and this belief is heavily fueled by the media, lay conversations and even criminological research, which typically focuses on violations of social and legal norms in urban settings (Donnermeyer, Jobes, & Barclay, in press; Jones, 1995). Indeed, "the characteristics of nostalgic fiction of yesterday are attributed to nonurban communities: they are a retreat from the brutalities of urban living, where people live closer to nature in simpler and (by implication) happier lives (Campbell, 2000, p. 562)." However, for the rural southeast Ohio woman quoted above, nothing can be further from the truth. In fact, her life was a "living hell" when she tried to leave her male partner and she received little, if any, social support. Of course, people who view official statistics as accurate indicators of crime would probably contend that her

experience is unique because similar forms of violent victimization are rarely found in rural police and court data sets (DeKeseredy, Schwartz, Fagen, & Hall, 2004).

Unfortunately, under the best of circumstances official statistics are notoriously poor at gathering information on all types of woman abuse, including separation/divorce sexual assault (DeKeseredy, Rogness, & Schwartz, 2004; Schwartz, 2000). As described in greater detail in subsequent sections of this paper, the rural sites selected for this study have characteristics that make it even less likely that women will report such victimization to formal service providers, neighbors, researchers or others, including geographic and social isolation (Logan, Walker, & Leukefeld, 2001).²

Then there are others who, based on a review of the extant literature on informal social control processes in rural communities,³ would contend that the above respondent's experience is atypical because these areas have higher levels of collective efficacy than do urban ones. In other words, they assert that rural areas are characterized by what Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls (1998, p. 1) refer to as "mutual trust among neighbors combined with a willingness to act on behalf of the common good, specifically to supervise children and maintain public order." This point is well taken, given that many rural citizens, including agents of social control, know each other socially and rural areas are less tolerant of crime than are metropolitan districts (Insurance Research Council, 1993; Donnermeyer et al., in press; Weisheit et al., 1996; Wilson, 1991). Still, recent studies found some elements of the antithesis of collective efficacy - social disorganization - in U.S. rural communities, which are associated with arrest rates for juvenile violence (Osgood & Chambers, 2000; 2003).⁴ Here, social disorganization is

defined as “the inability of a community structure to realize the common values of its residents and maintain effective controls” (Sampson & Groves, 1989, p. 777).

It cannot be emphasized enough that collective efficacy in rural areas takes different shapes and forms, and is not necessarily restricted to deterring or preventing crimes such as woman abuse (Barclay, Donnermeyer, & Jobes, in press). Moreover, what may appear to outsiders as social disorganization is often “simply a different form of social organization if one takes the trouble to look closely” (Venkatesh, 2000; Wacquant, 1997, p. 346). For example, if we consider social cohesion, many of the women interviewed (67%, n=29) for this study reported on a variety of ways in which their ex-partners’ male peers perpetuated and legitimated separation/divorce sexual assault (DeKeseredy, Schwartz, Fagen, & Hall, 2004). Similarly, Websdale (1998) uncovered evidence of a powerful “ol’ boys network” that serves to dominate and oppress rural Kentucky women. Below one of my Ohio respondents provides an account of how such an all-male sexist network and other symptoms of what Websdale (1998) refers to as “rural patriarchy” functioned to help stop her from leaving her abusive partner:

Another time, after I finally got away from him and I was having these problems. I was, I was on drugs real heavy um, and I was trying to get away from him. He was still calling me. This was just in the last nine months. Um, I called Victim Awareness in my town and um, told them that I had been abused by him. Oh, they kept telling me that they was going to do something about it, and they never did. The one other time I went to Victim Awareness, they told me that um, they were going to question the neighbors and stuff. And the neighbors said that um, you know, they said that the neighbors didn’t, didn’t see or hear anything. So, they I

didn't have enough ah proof, so. Basically, nothing was ever done. He's a corrections officer in the town that I lived in, and he's friends with the sheriff and whoever else.

In sum, then, "social organization may facilitate some types of crime even as it constrains others" (Donnermeyer et al., in press, p. 14). Data presented in this paper show that while they may be able to count on their neighbors to help prevent public crimes (e.g., vandalism), many rural Ohio men can also rely on their male friends and neighbors, including those who are police officers, to support a violent patriarchal status quo, which to them is acting on "behalf of the common good." Consider, too, that in rural sections of Ohio and other states such as Kentucky, there is widespread acceptance of woman abuse and community norms prohibiting victims from publicly talking about their experiences and from seeking social support (DeKeseredy & Joseph, 2005; Krishnan, Hilbert, & Pace, 2001; Lewis, 2003; Navin, Stockum, & Campbell-Ruggaard, 1993).

Since the 1970s, a growing number of studies have enhanced an empirical and theoretical understanding of the physical abuse of women during and after separation/divorce,⁵ but less than a handful have examined sexual assaults on rural women who want to leave, are trying to leave, or who have left their spouses or live-in male partners. Further, none of the work done so far on this problem has examined the role of social disorganization/collective efficacy. A key objective, then, of this paper is to help fill a research gap by presenting results of an exploratory study of separation/divorce sexual assault in rural Ohio.

METHODS

Sample Selection and Recruitment

Conducting a study of any type of rural woman abuse is challenging for several reasons, including those discussed previously (e.g., the influence of the “ol’ boys network). Other factors that affect data gathering are geographic and social isolation (Dutton, Worrell, Terrell, Denaro, & Thompson, 2002; Krishnan, Hilbert, & VanLeeuwen, 2001), inadequate (if any) public transportation (Lewis, 2003), and low telephone subscription rates (DeKeseredy & Joseph, 2005). Moreover, many rural women have abusive current or former partners who “feed off of” women’s isolation and poverty to magnify their isolation (Websdale, 1998). For example, Laura reported: “He kept me isolated and he kept me under control. He made final decisions, you know. He, uh, wanted to be in control. He was in control for us, or you know I felt it.” There are, of course, other factors that preclude many rural women from participating in studies of this kind.⁶ However, the most important point to consider here is that paying constant attention to women’s well-founded fears of being harmed by a current or ex-partner is a key element in recruiting a sample and gathering data.

Techniques like those employed by Bowker (1983) in Milwaukee generated the sample. For example, the advertisement presented in Figure 1 was placed once a week during two different six-week periods in a free newspaper available throughout Athens County, Ohio. Also, posters about the study were pinned up in many public places, such as courthouses, and were given to social service providers who came into contact with abused women. In addition:

- Two local newspapers gave considerable coverage to the project.

- Ohio University sent out a press release to newspapers and other Ohio-based media.
- Three local radio stations and Ohio University's television station carried public service announcements about the study.
- The Principal Investigator and the director of the local shelter appeared on a local television news show to discuss this project and broader issues related to it.
- The Ohio Domestic Violence Network and other agencies told interested parties (e.g., rural shelter workers) about the study and helped to recruit participants.
- Local shelter staff, a police department social worker, employees of the county sheriff's department, Planned Parenthood, Women's Center staff at a local two-year college, and employees of the local Sexual Assault Survivor Advocate Program informed possible respondents about the study.
- Feminist criminologist Judith Grant told women who participated in her rural Ohio addiction study about this research.
- Index-like cards with the information provided in the recruiting poster were routinely placed on top of newspaper boxes inside stores and on sidewalks in Athens.

FIGURE 1

NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT

**Call for interested women of Athens, Hocking, and Vinton Counties
for participation in an Ohio University research project**

Have you ever had unwanted sexual experiences while trying to leave your husband or male live-in partner?

Or, have you ever had unwanted sexual experiences after you left your husband or male live-in partner?

We would greatly appreciate your participation in a confidential interview. Your name will not be given to anyone.

We will pay you \$25.00 for your time and transportation costs. Also, we will talk to you at a time and location of your choosing.

**If you would like to be interviewed, please call Mae at (740) 517-1547 or
Carolyn at (740) 517-1502.**

Two female research assistants carried cellular phones 24 hours a day to receive calls from women interested in participating in the study. Callers were told the purpose of the study and were then asked a series of screening questions to determine their eligibility to be interviewed. The main criteria were being 18 years of age or older and having ever had any type of unwanted sexual experience when they wanted to end, were trying to end, or after they had ended a relationship with a husband or live-in male partner. If they met the selection criteria, the women were then invited to a semi-structured face-to-face interview at a time and place of their choosing, and they were paid \$25.00 for their time and up to \$7.75 for travel expenses. Six Interviews were conducted over the phone, five were held off-campus, and the rest were done in an Ohio University office.

A total of 43 women were interviewed. Posters placed in public places attracted most of our respondents (n=27). Eight women called the number after exposure to ads or

stories about the study in the media and the same number were referred to the research team by individuals or organizations (n=8). Most of the respondents (n=30) lived in Athens County, three lived in Hocking County, one lived in Vinton County, and nine lived in other rural parts of the state. The mean age of the sample was 35 and the mean income for 2002 was \$13,588. Sixty-five percent (n=28) had some type of post-secondary education and close to half of the participants were unemployed. Of the 25 who had been married, all got divorced or legally separated, but only five remarried. Most of respondents also had children.

Definition of Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is multidimensional in nature and involves much more than forced penetration. For example, one interviewee was raped while she was under the influence of a potent drug that her “ex-partner” slipped into her drink at a bar where he was trying to convince her to return to him. Another respondent was the victim of what Russell (1990) refers to as repeated “blackmail rapes” when she wanted to end her relationship. She was deeply afraid of losing her children and below is her account of why her partner sexually assaulted her:

Um, to punish me for leaving him. To punish me for getting pregnant, um, to punish me for embarrassing him and um, to control me.... And then something would happen and he would know it was getting close to the end of our relationship once again and he would start it. And the whole time I would be crying, but I couldn't cry loud enough because if his parents heard us he swore he would take our children away. I know he did this when he thought I was getting ready to leave and he knew that I couldn't live without my children.

Thus, to avoid the problem of underreporting and ultimately underestimating the extent of separation/divorce sexual assault, this study used a broad definition that incorporates a wide range of injurious sexual behaviors. Guided by Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski's (1987, p. 166) conceptual and empirical work, the research team's classification is similar to their four types of sexual assault. Table 1 presents the number of respondents who experienced one or more of these behaviors and only a few were victimized by just one of these harms:

- *Sexual Contact* includes sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting) arising from menacing verbal pressure, misuse of authority, threats of harm, or actual physical force.
- *Sexual Coercion* includes unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of menacing verbal pressure or the misuse of authority.
- *Attempted rape* includes attempted unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of or threats of force, or the use of drugs or alcohol.
- *Rape* includes unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of or threats of force and other unwanted sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis) arising from the use of or threat of force, or the use of drugs or alcohol.

TABLE 1

SEPARATION/DIVORCE SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVALENCE RATES (N = 43)

TYPE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT	N	%
Sexual Contact	19	44
Sexual Coercion	32	74
Attempted Rape	8	18
Rape	35	81

Perceptions of Collective Efficacy and Safety

Since this study focused on many factors related to separation/divorce sexual assault, all of Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls' (1997) questions about collective efficacy in urban neighborhoods could not be included in the semi-structured interview schedule. Thus, respondents were only asked the following, which are modified versions of items included in Sampson et al.'s (1997) measures of informal social control and social cohesion and trust:

- How often do you get together with your neighbors in a typical week?
- Could you count on your neighbors to help you solve your personal problems?

To acquire more information about perceptions of their communities, respondents were also asked if they personally know other women who have been raped or sexually assaulted, if they thought that unwanted sex, rape and sexual assault are major problems in their communities, how safe they felt when they are at home, and what type of help they asked for and/or received. Moreover, as stated previously, interviewees were asked to report information on their estranged partners' peers, and they were asked questions about the major characteristics of the men who abused them.⁷

RESULTS

Obviously, data derived from this exploratory study cannot be generalized to the broader rural Ohio population. Still, the findings strongly suggest that if there are high levels of collective efficacy in the respondents' communities, they do not function to prevent and deter separation/divorce sexual assault. For example, most of the interviewees (84%) stated that women experiencing unwanted sex in their community is a major problem and 81 percent reported that rape or sexual assault is also a serious problem. Consider what Lorraine said:

I've talked to quite a few women...and word gets around in a small community...and uh, you know these women. You know they say, Have you got out yet?" But you find out you know that they've got a lot in common with you and they just open up and start talking with you. One woman, she's in her 80's and she was talking to me and she says, "If you can get out, get out. You're still young enough." She says, "I'm sitting here waiting to die." "I'm too old to get out," and she says she takes abuse everyday.

Joan is another one of many respondents who also perceived sexual assault as "being rampant" in her town:

It's a big problem. And, a lot of people get by with it. A lot of people! Even these 15 year old kids that are touching these 7 year old kids are getting by with it. Yeah, and everything is getting way out of hand. Nobody is doing nothing but slapping everybody on the hands and its justified. And it's not justified, what you take from that child or woman, or man is not justified because...when you go and

take from them that is something you took that will never be given back from nobody. Nobody can refill something that has been taken from you.

Some people might argue that the above and similar perceptions are heavily influenced by the women's own victimization. However, that 81 percent of the respondents stated that they personally know other women who were sexually assaulted provides further evidence that such victimization is a major problem in some rural Ohio communities and that little is being done to prevent it. Jayne is one interviewee who knows more than one woman in her community who has either been raped or sexually assaulted in other ways:

With the girls I know, all of them have had at least one sexual assault experience, if not rape, and mostly it goes unreported because they feel that they're at fault or it's an isolated situation that this person wouldn't do it otherwise.

Given their own experiences of separation/divorce sexual assault and their knowledge of others who have had similar experiences, it is not surprising, then, that over half (58%) of the interviewees do not feel safe when they are at home. After all, many men do not leave their ex-partners alone and their "visits can be deadly" (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997).⁸ As Polk (2003, p. 134) reminds us, "[T]ime and time again the phrase 'if I can't have you, no one will' echoes through the data" on homicide in the context of sexual intimacy. Sometimes, too, "children can become unfortunate pawns in the violent games" played by male ex-partners (Polk, 1994, p. 143), which is one of the key reasons why many interviewees' children also feel unsafe at home. Agnes' son is one example of a child who has a well-founded fear of being killed due to the abuse he and his mother endured during the process of leaving her husband. She said that, "My son automatically

locks the doors when he gets into the house. He only sleeps with the dog. He has to have the dog in his room at night because that's his warning signal."

Another factor that exacerbates a group of respondents' fear is knowing that the men who abuse them or have done so have strong social ties with male peers who sexually or physically assault women. For example, 47 percent (n=20) of the sample stated that they knew that their estranged partners' friends engaged in these types of woman abuse. In fact, Deb said that *all* of her ex-partners' friends hit women or sexually assault them, and several women said that they directly observed their partners' friends abusing female intimates. Moreover, a few perpetrators enlisted the help of their friends to sexually assault some of the interviewees. Such male peer support⁹ frequently involved forcing women to have sex with members of their "ol' boys network." This is what happened to Becca:

Well, him and his friend got me so wasted. They took turns with me and I remembered most of it, but, um, there was also drugs involved where not as much on my behalf as theirs. I was just drunk. And I did remember most of it and the next morning I woke up feeling so dirty and so degraded and then it ended up getting around that I was the slut...And in my eyes that was rape due to the fact that I was so drunk. And I definitely didn't deserve that. And I was hurting. I was hurting the next day.

A growing literature shows that neighbors are more likely to help each other out in urban communities with high levels of collective efficacy (Sampson et al., 1997; Taylor, 2001). However, many rural women interviewed for this study have neighbors that adhere to and enforce what Browning (2002) refers to as "nonintervention norms."

For example, 84 percent of the respondents stated that they could not count on their neighbors to help solve their personal problems. Below is what happened to Grace shortly after her husband found out that she wanted to leave him:

I remember my husband making me have sex with him one time when people were in the next room and none of them guys would come in and help me. And they knew he was hitting me, but they figured that he was my husband. If it were a stranger it would have been different.

Still, some women said that their neighbors did not help them because they were too embarrassed to reveal their pain and suffering to them or because privacy norms dictated that they “keep their mouths shut,” which is also a key barrier to obtaining formal support services in rural communities (Logan, Stevenson, Evans, & Leukefeld, 2004). As June pointed out when asked about her ties with neighbors:

Back then you never really talked about things like that with other women. So I really don't know. I didn't share. I kept everything a secret. I didn't want anybody to know what was going on. You know you try to keep everything painted pretty and you know we lived in a sub-division, where the only thing that separated your house was a driveway. So, uh, you didn't talk a lot about your personal affairs to your neighbors.

Seventy-nine percent of the sample said that their partners strongly believed that men should be in charge of the household, which partially also explains why 67 percent of the sample did not get together with their neighbors in a typical week and thus could not count on them for help. “Being in charge” often involved restricting women's day-to-day activities and “cutting them off from the outside world.” For example, even if her

neighbors were willing to help her, Pat couldn't report her abusive experiences to them because she "was only allowed to be around people at work basically." Jackie's ex-partner behaved in a similar fashion because "he thought that he was all I needed. You know, a measure of love was that I could get all my needs met from him."

Men's fear of facing negative sanctions for their abusive conduct was another factor that contributed to cutting their partners off from contact with neighbors. For example, according to Mandy, "I had black and blue marks on me so you know he didn't want somebody to see that." Then there are a few women who said that their neighbors did not help them because they were experiencing similar problems. June is one person who faced this situation. "A lot" of her neighbors were in relationships characterized by frequent marital rape, wife beating, and other forms of male-to-female victimization. Her male neighbors condoned and engaged in woman abuse, while their partners were involved in an ongoing struggle to maintain their own safety and did not have the time or energy to help others.

In sum, then, in addition to facing barriers to formal means of social support identified by Logan, Evans, Stevenson and Jordan (2005) and others (Logan et al., 2004), research reported here shows that many rural survivors of separation/divorce sexual assault cannot rely on informal processes of social control. This is not to say, however, that the women suffered in total silence. For example, 58 percent turned to at least one friend for help, but most of their friends did not live near them. Further, 44 percent sought assistance from the police and 40 percent received help from a local shelter. A more detailed description of the sample's experiences with these and other social support resources is the subject of another article.

CONCLUSIONS

Following Browning (2002), this is one of the first studies to apply collective efficacy theory to woman abuse in intimate, heterosexual relationships. However, this project is distinct from his and others like it (e.g., DeKeseredy, Alvi, Schwartz, & Tomaszewski, 2003) because it examines the linkage between community characteristics and separation/divorce sexual assault in rural communities. Obviously, more research is needed, including empirical work on the perceptions and experiences of rural women who are not abused. Moreover, the data cannot be generalized to the broader rural Ohio population. Still, this study yields several conclusions that should be addressed in future empirical and theoretical contributions to a sociological understanding of rural separation/divorce sexual assault.

Perhaps the most important conclusion is that we should continue to question the assumption that there is more collective control on criminal behavior in rural settings. This may be the case with street violence and other types of crime, but as Websdale (1998) discovered in rural Kentucky, the abuse of women in parts of rural Ohio seems to be just as prevalent as it is in urban areas and that many rural perpetrators of separation/divorce sexual assault do not seem to be deterred by powerful forms of informal social control. On the contrary, there is strong evidence that in the sites selected for this study, men are directly or indirectly encouraged to abuse women who want to leave or who have left them by male peers and by neighbors who do not want to intervene or who are unaware of their highly injurious behaviors.

Further, data gleaned from 43 survivors compel researchers and theorists to rethink the concept of collective efficacy. Again, it can take many shapes and forms, and

often what is perceived as the “common good” may actually be behaviors and discourses that threaten the health and well-being of women seeking freedom from patriarchal oppression. Of course, not all rural regions, including those in Ohio, are the same and there are probably many rural communities that effectively function to enhance women’s safety (Websdale, 1998). Thus, it is necessary to examine rural regional variations in all kinds of woman abuse and community responses to this pressing social problem.

Another point to consider is that almost all studies of collective efficacy/social disorganization and crime use quantitative techniques, such analyses of census data. However, for reasons described here and elsewhere, many rural social problems are not easy to study using such methods, which is perhaps one of the key reasons why so few researchers study woman abuse in these settings (Websdale, 1998). Further, quantitative methods cannot adequately describe the complexities of rural woman abuse and community responses to it (DeKeseredy & Joseph, 2003). Thus, it is essential to continue “going beyond census data” to examine community characteristics that affect separation/divorce sexual assault and other forms of woman abuse (Osgood & Chambers, 2000). One suggestion is to specifically design a qualitative project that focuses exclusively on the topics of central concern to this paper and that uses in-depth interviews and participant observations of community relations. Websdale’s (1998) study is an excellent example of such a project. He rode with police officers, observed woman abuse cases in court, talked to battered women, interviewed agents of social control, and actually lived in Eastern Kentucky. Above all, as Isabel remind us:

Listen to the victim. Understand how traumatic that experience may have been.

Also what needs to be understood is how is that experience is going to affect that person in the future and any children that may be in that home.

What is to be done about improving informal community responses to separation/divorce sexual assault in rural communities? Websdale (1998) and others (e.g., Kelly (1996) contend that networks of local women can help rural abuse survivors in many ways, including giving them information about how to access formal support services. This approach was of value to Agnes. She belonged to “a network of women, uh, just giving each other emotional support in order to survive the network of men they were hooked up with.” Although the development of community-based, informal prevention and support strategies is an important goal, such initiatives should not be viewed as substitutes for economic strategies and public spending. To nourish a community, and to develop one that is rich in collective efficacy, jobs and effective social programs are still absolutely necessary (Currie, 1985; DeKeseredy et al., 2003).

Currently, Ohio receives little financial assistance from state and federal governments, which partially explains why most interviewees did not rank shelters and mental health staff as the best sources of help. For example, all of the social support providers I worked with want to do more to curb all forms of woman abuse, but are unable to because of government cutbacks. Unfortunately, the Athens County Department of Jobs and Family Services budget was cut by \$9 million during the data-gathering phase of this study (Evans, 2002). Also, the Athens, Ohio shelter receives \$17,801 less in funding and the crisis hotline in the same city has been “scaled back

considerably” due to rising Medicaid costs in Ohio and requirements for local agencies to match Medicaid funding (Claussen, 2003).

It is also important to note that although the respondents perceived an absence of effective informal social control, their own policy recommendations did not address this problem and focused primarily on improving formal support services, better education, and increased public awareness. Joan is one of many respondents who made such recommendations and said:

Um, I think that awareness, somehow get awareness out there through human services, um, you know, the welfare department, so and so forth. You can get pamphlets out that women don't have to put up with it. You know, um, like I said, the first place for it to start is with awareness, you know, in, in the community like within the welfare office, maybe WIC office, whatever offices that especially young women or women that are, um, not educated you know. And even if you are educated it doesn't make any difference. I was educated. I went to school for human services. I went to school for all that. I mean victim abuse and victim counseling. I mean I went to school to counsel people and it was happening to me. So, even women that are educated it can happen to. But, if you can, you know, if they can be more aware, if the women can be more aware then maybe it would at least take the numbers down.

Pricilla is another survivor who emphasized the need for education:

Education, education, education. Because you know what, I think that first step in prevention, any type of prevention, is education both genders, all races, all religions, everything. If you educate and explain to a population that this behavior

is unwanted because it hurts another human being. Not because it is just wrong or morally wrong, but because it is inhumane. And so because of that, well, I think that is a good enough reason to education and say hey look, this is inhuman behavior this is unacceptable, period.

To be expected, most of the respondents were sharply critical of the criminal justice system's response to separation/divorce sexual assault and when asked how it could be improved, the bulk of them said that police officers, judges, probation officers, and so on should "listen to what the women have to say." As Jackie stated:

Well, I could write a book on that, but in general, women need to be heard. Many, many, many times women's voices are not heard. This is why I was interested in this study, I have been focusing on this subject in my classes and I wanted so see what this girl had to say. Like I said, I could write a book, but the problem is women have lost their voice completely....

The voices of the interviewees reveal that formal and better intervention by state authorities is more important for them than focusing on collective efficacy at this point in time. Perhaps this is because, as Goeckermann, Hamberger and Barber (1994), Logan et al. (2004), and Websdale (1998) uncovered, many rural legal officials and other service providers contribute to a form of collective efficacy that protects and/or encourages woman abuse. According to Marlene:

And then with the criminal justice system start doing something from the beginning. You know, stop this shit. Just because he was a correctional officer with this political stuff, you know, they don't want his name in the newspaper or whatever, you know. I don't know whether that goes from the get go, you know,

on how we choose are police officers, you know, and so on and so forth. I mean I know that there's um, you're going to have these kinds of people wherever you go, but this was a whole community you know.

Cultures, whether they are urban or rural, "live through word of mouth and example" (Jacobs, 2005, p. 5). Most of the women interviewed for this study perceive their communities' cultures as being patriarchal and view an unknown number of formal service providers as setting "a bad example" for others. Again, in addition to paying selective attention to the voices of survivors, many rural Ohio agents of social control are part of an "ol' boys network" that includes members who degrade and abuse women. For example, based on her brutal experiences, Jolene contends that:

Cops are number one bad for unwanted sex, for forcing unwanted sex on their mates and violence. They've got to change the whole structure of the protective system with more women on the force. They're all men, how's a man gonna relate to what a woman just went through? It's a good ole boys network. And it's terrible that our police have come to that. They're not protection.

Like data generated by some other studies of rural women's barriers to social support, many of the results presented here are based on women's perceptions (Logan et al., 2004). Still, the findings strongly suggest that to strengthen a community, and to develop one that is committed to end much pain and suffering, a commitment to the "institutionalization of feminist interests" is the keystone of any successful approach to curbing woman abuse (Mazur & McBride-Stetson, 1995, p. 10). Achieving this goal is a major challenge, but as Websdale (1998, p. 194) recommends, "any social policy

initiatives must use the structure of rural patriarchy, in all its intricate manifestations, as an essential frame of reference.”

NOTES

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to protect the identities of all those who participated in and contributed to this study, including service providers.

² Following Websdale (1995, p. 102) and Wuest and Merritt-Gray (1999), rather than simply restricting a definition of rural to population size (e.g., 5,000) or to living in the countryside, here, rural communities are referred to as those “where people know each other’s business, come into regular contact with each other, and share a larger core of values than is true of people in urban areas.”

³ See Weisheit et al. (1996) for a review of this literature.

⁴ These elements are residential instability, family disruption, and ethnic heterogeneity.

⁵ See DeKeseredy, Ellis and Alvi (2005), DeKeseredy, Rogness and Schwartz (2004) and Hardesty (2002) for in-depth reviews of the literature on male-to-female physical assaults during and after separation/divorce.

⁶ See DeKeseredy and Joseph (2005) and DeKeseredy, Schwartz, Fagen and Hall (2004) for a more in-depth discussion of the problems associated with gathering separation/divorce sexual assault data in rural communities.

⁷ See DeKeseredy, Schwartz, Fagen and Hall (2004) for more in-depth data on these characteristics.

⁸ See Browne, Williams and Dutton (1999), DeKeseredy, Ellis and Alvi (2005), DeKeseredy, Rogness and Schwartz (2004), Ellis and DeKeseredy (1997), and Hardesty (2002) for reviews of the extant social scientific literature on male-to-female homicide during separation/divorce.

⁹ See DeKeseredy, Schwartz, Fagen and Hall (2004) for more in-depth data on how male peer support contributes to separation/divorce sexual assault in rural Ohio communities.

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