



# Rural Pennsylvania

A Legislative Agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly

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## Survey of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault Victim Service Agencies

### Introduction

Domestic violence and sexual assault know no boundaries. According to the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, in 2003, more than 39,300 rural residents sought assistance or 11.6 clients for every 1,000 rural residents. In urban areas, nearly 94,400 persons sought assistance, or 10.6 clients for every 1,000 urban residences.

Statewide, this assistance was provided by 81 local domestic violence (DV) and sexual assault (SA) victim service agencies. These agencies assist clients with counseling, medical and legal accompaniment/advocacy, referrals to other agencies, and additional services. To provide these services, the agencies receive both federal and state funding, along with donations from county government, community groups, businesses and individuals.

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania was interested in learning more about the unique challenges and opportunities facing rural DV and SA agencies, and in comparing rural agencies with urban agencies. To accomplish this, the Center surveyed the directors of the state's domestic violence and sexual assault service agencies. The survey response rate was 43 percent.

According to the survey

results, rural agencies face financial, staffing, and community awareness challenges. The results also indicated that rural and urban directors differ in their opinions on how SA and DV cases are handled by the police, medical professionals, and courts.

### Methods

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania conducted a statewide survey of Pennsylvania's sexual assault and domestic violence victim service agencies. The purpose of the survey was to identify and analyze the issues facing rural agencies and to compare them with urban agencies.

To develop the survey instrument, the Center received input from two statewide nonprofit organi-

**Table 1: Characteristics of Rural and Urban DV and SA Agencies**

|  | Rural | Urban |
|--|-------|-------|
| <b>TYPES OF SERVICES</b>                           |       |       |
| Domestic Violence Services Only                    | 14.3% | 0.0%  |
| Sexual Assault Services Only                       | 19.0% | 62.5% |
| Both Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services | 66.7% | 37.5% |
| <b>FACILITIES</b>                                  |       |       |
| Median # Facilities                                | 2     | 3     |
| <b>NUMBER OF HOURS OF OPERATION PER WEEK</b>       |       |       |
| Median # Hours Per Week                            | 80    | 147   |
| <b>STAFF</b>                                       |       |       |
| Median # Staff (Full, Part-time & Volunteer)       | 25    | 49    |
| % Paid Full-Time Staff                             | 33.3% | 43.2% |
| % Paid Part-Time Staff                             | 17.8% | 9.0%  |
| % Volunteer Staff                                  | 48.9% | 47.8% |

*Due to the small sample size, caution should be used in interpreting the results*

zations: the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR). In addition to providing feedback on the survey questions, these two organizations provided the Center with their mailing lists of victim service agencies.

In February 2004, the Center mailed a 12-page survey to the directors of the 81 DV and SA agencies. By mid-April 2004, 35 surveys were returned, for a response rate of 43 percent. Of the 35 responses, 26 were from rural agencies and nine were from urban agencies. A service agency was identified as either rural or urban based on the county(s) it served.

For the survey, the Center used its definition of rural. Agencies in counties with a population density below the statewide density of 274 persons per square mile in 2000 were considered rural. Agencies in counties with a population density above the statewide density were considered urban. Agencies that served multiple counties were identified as either rural or urban based on whether the counties they served had a total population density above or below the statewide density.

The survey's confidence interval, or margin of error, is 12.6 percent.

## Data Limitations

### ***Incomplete Responses***

While 35 agencies returned the survey, many completed only portions of the survey. This was likely due to the length and complexity of the survey. Readers therefore should use caution in generalizing the results to all agencies.

### ***Low Urban Response Rate***

Only nine of Pennsylvania's 37 urban victim service agencies responded to the survey. This 24 percent response rate allowed for only limited statistical comparison with rural agencies. In addition, the urban responses were biased toward providers of sexual assault services. This group made up 63 percent of the urban respondents. Despite these caveats, the urban responses provide some insight into how urban agencies differ from rural agencies.

### ***Confidentiality Concerns***

The survey asked the directors for aggregate information about the types, number and characteristics of clients they served. Some directors, however, may not have wanted to share this information since they may have considered it highly confidential. Readers should again use caution in generalizing the results to all agencies.

Because of the relatively small sample size, this data analysis focused on the frequency of responses. Unless otherwise noted, only the statistical median was reported. For ease of reading, the median was referred to as the "typical agency." In addition, unless otherwise noted, all figures represent the combination of SA and DV agencies.

Finally, for ease of reading, the fiscal year will be referred to by its last year: for example, fiscal year 2002-2003 is referred to as 2003.

## Findings

### ***Organization***

The typical rural agency was established in 1979 and offered both domestic violence and sexual assault services from two office locations. In a normal week in 2003, this typical rural agency was open 80 hours (an average of 11 hours per day, seven days a week). In comparison, the typical urban agency was established in 1974, had three office locations, and was open 147 hours a week (an average of 21 hours per day, seven days a week).

Including the director, the typical rural agency had 25 staffers. Of these, 33 percent were paid full-time staff members, 18 percent were paid part-time staffers, and the remaining 49 percent were volunteers. The typical urban agency had 49 staffers, of which 43 percent were paid full-time staff members, 9 percent paid part-time staffers, and 48 percent were volunteers.

In 2003, the typical rural agency had \$538,500 in revenues; more than 86 percent of which came from the state and federal government. The remainder of the revenues (14 percent) came from other sources, such as the United Way or other nonprofit organizations, county government, individuals and businesses. When asked to put a dollar amount to the in-kind and donated goods and services received, the respondents estimated a median amount of \$16,300.

The typical urban agency had about \$1.5 million in revenues, with 75 percent coming from the state and federal government. In addition, respondents estimated a

**Table 2: Agency Financial Characteristics**

|   | Rural     | Urban       |
|---|-----------|-------------|
| <b>REVENUES</b>   |           |             |
| Median Total Revenues, 2002-03                                | \$538,492 | \$1,498,116 |
| Median Percent of Revenue from State & Federal Sources        | 86%       | 75%         |
| Median Cash Value of All In-Kind & Donated Goods and Services | \$16,324  | \$26,400    |
| <b>EXPENDITURES</b>   |           |             |
| Median Total Expenditures                                     | \$530,567 | \$1,487,858 |
| Median Percent of Expenditures for Personnel                  | 72%       | 79%         |
| <b>EXPENDITURES PER CLIENT</b>                                |           |             |
| Total Expenditures Per Client                                 | \$524     | \$419       |

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median of \$26,400 in in-kind goods and services.

Regarding expenditures, personnel costs, such as salaries, benefits and training, accounted for nearly 72 percent of the expenses for the typical rural agency in 2003. Among urban agencies, personnel costs accounted for about 79 percent of total expenditures.

In 2003, the average expenditure per client for rural agencies was \$524 and for urban agencies was \$419.

When asked to identify their greatest unmet agency need, 62 percent of rural directors said fundraising. The second greatest unmet need, at 58 percent, was recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers. For urban directors, the greatest unmet needs were fundraising at 57 percent, and recruiting, training, and retaining professional staff at 44 percent.

### **Community Outreach**

Fifty-eight percent of the rural directors said that, in their service area, the level of public awareness of DV and SA issues was poor to average. Thirty-two percent of the directors said public awareness was good, and 10 percent said it was very good. The two most often cited barriers to increasing community awareness of the issues were lack of funding (81 percent) and lack of staff (73 percent). The responses of urban directors were nearly identical.

Both rural and urban directors said they offer education and training programs to community groups. Groups that participated in these programs included law enforcement and court officials, clergy, and health care providers.

In rating how cooperative different community groups were in supporting the work of the DV and SA agencies, 64 percent of rural directors rated the

court system and social service agencies as being cooperative to very cooperative. Fifty-four percent of the directors also rated family members as being cooperative to very cooperative. Urban directors rated social service agencies, the school system and the court system as cooperative or very cooperative.

Table 3 on the next page shows whether the agencies agreed or disagreed to specific statements about how the police, courts, and medical professionals handled DV and SA issues.

### **Clients**

The typical rural agency had 687 clients in 2003. Of these, 55 percent were victims of domestic violence, 22 percent were sexual assault victims, and the remaining 23 percent were other clients (family members of victims, persons needing counseling, etc.).

Rural agency directors said 81 percent of their clients were self-referred. Clients also found out about the agencies through referrals from law enforcement authorities and friends and family members.

The typical urban agency had 1,169 clients in 2003. Of these, 24 percent were victims of domestic violence, 42 percent were victims of sexual assault, and 34 percent were other types of clients.

According to the urban agency directors, 78 percent of clients were self-referred. Clients were also referred by other social service agencies.

According to the data supplied by the agency directors, in 2003, 56 percent of the rural DV clients were under age 35. The typical client was a female who was married or cohabitating. Fifty-five percent of the DV clients had dependent children and 78 percent were low-income.

**Table 3: Responses to Statements on How the Police, Courts, and Medical Professionals Handle DV and SA Issues**

|  | Rural    |         |       | Urban    |         |       |
|--|----------|---------|-------|----------|---------|-------|
|  | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree |
| <b>POLICE</b>  |          |         |       |          |         |       |
| Police here understand DV laws   | 36.8%    | 31.6%   | 31.6% | 33.3%    | 66.7%   | 0.0%  |
| Police enforce DV laws   | 52.6%    | 21.1%   | 26.3% | 57.1%    | 28.6%   | 14.3% |
| Police respond quickly to DV calls   | 36.8%    | 31.6%   | 31.6% | 28.6%    | 28.6%   | 42.9% |
| Police are able to identify signs of DV  | 47.4%    | 21.1%   | 31.6% | 28.6%    | 42.9%   | 28.6% |
| Police treat DV victims fairly and respectfully  | 36.8%    | 36.8%   | 26.3% | 42.9%    | 42.9%   | 14.3% |
| Police inform DV victims of rights services  | 15.8%    | 47.4%   | 36.8% | 28.6%    | 28.6%   | 42.9% |
| Police gather evidence follow up on DV investigations  | 44.4%    | 38.9%   | 16.7% | 83.3%    | 16.7%   | 0.0%  |
| Police make DV arrests when appropriate  | 63.2%    | 15.8%   | 21.1% | 42.9%    | 42.9%   | 14.3% |
| Police can identify a primary vs. a secondary aggressor  | 80.0%    | 5.0%    | 15.0% | 37.5%    | 50.0%   | 12.5% |
| Police here understand SA laws   | 40.0%    | 30.0%   | 30.0% | 14.3%    | 42.9%   | 42.9% |
| Police enforce SA laws   | 60.0%    | 15.0%   | 25.0% | 25.0%    | 37.5%   | 37.5% |
| Police respond quickly to SA calls   | 33.3%    | 28.6%   | 38.1% | 12.5%    | 37.5%   | 50.0% |
| Police are able to identify signs of SA  | 52.4%    | 23.8%   | 23.8% | 25.0%    | 50.0%   | 25.0% |
| Police treat SA victims fairly and respectfully  | 38.1%    | 28.6%   | 33.3% | 25.0%    | 50.0%   | 25.0% |
| Police inform SA victims of rights services  | 45.5%    | 18.2%   | 36.4% | 12.5%    | 50.0%   | 37.5% |
| Police gather evidence follow up on SA investigations  | 33.3%    | 33.3%   | 33.3% | 12.5%    | 50.0%   | 37.5% |
| Police make SA arrests when appropriate  | 33.3%    | 38.1%   | 28.6% | 12.5%    | 37.5%   | 50.0% |
| <b>COURTS</b>  |          |         |       |          |         |       |
| Judges here understand DV laws   | 31.6%    | 21.1%   | 47.4% | 42.9%    | 28.6%   | 28.6% |
| Judges ensure fair and expedient DV proceedings  | 26.3%    | 21.1%   | 52.6% | 57.1%    | 14.3%   | 28.6% |
| Court systems appropriately handle family cases involving both domestic violence and custody issues          | 55.0%    | 20.0%   | 25.0% | 50.0%    | 37.5%   | 12.5% |
| Judges here understand SA laws   | 23.8%    | 28.6%   | 47.6% | 37.5%    | 12.5%   | 50.0% |
| Judges ensure fair and expedient SA proceedings  | 38.1%    | 23.8%   | 38.1% | 57.1%    | 14.3%   | 28.6% |
| Court clerks understand SA laws  | 47.6%    | 28.6%   | 23.8% | 62.5%    | 37.5%   | 0.0%  |
| Court systems keep victims aware of the status of their offenders and solicit appropriate input from victims | 45.5%    | 27.3%   | 27.3% | 33.3%    | 33.3%   | 33.3% |
| Justice system gives fair/equal treatment to DV/SA cases when the victim has been under the influence        | 56.5%    | 26.1%   | 17.4% | 66.7%    | 33.3%   | 0.0%  |
| Courts hand down appropriate sentences to repeat offenders   | 54.5%    | 27.3%   | 18.2% | 66.7%    | 22.2%   | 11.1% |
| <b>MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS</b>   |          |         |       |          |         |       |
| Doctors and nurses can identify likely DV victims  | 42.1%    | 36.8%   | 21.1% | 14.3%    | 57.1%   | 28.6% |
| Doctors and nurses provide information about victim services to patients when DV is suspected                | 36.8%    | 21.1%   | 42.1% | 12.5%    | 50.0%   | 37.5% |
| Doctors and nurses can identify likely SA victim   | 30.0%    | 35.0%   | 35.0% | 12.5%    | 50.0%   | 37.5% |
| Doctors and nurses provide information about victim services to patients when SA is suspected                | 30.0%    | 30.0%   | 40.0% | 12.5%    | 37.5%   | 50.0% |
| Doctors and nurses can properly administer a rape kit  | 31.6%    | 21.1%   | 47.4% | 28.6%    | 28.6%   | 42.9% |
| <b>PROTECTION FROM ABUSE (PFA)</b>   |          |         |       |          |         |       |
| Court clerks understand DV laws and PFAs   | 21.1%    | 36.8%   | 42.1% | 57.1%    | 28.6%   | 14.3% |
| Court clerks give aid to people filing charges PFAs  | 21.1%    | 63.2%   | 15.8% | 57.1%    | 28.6%   | 14.3% |
| Judges willingly issue PFAs when warranted   | 35.0%    | 20.0%   | 45.0% | 37.5%    | 0.0%    | 62.5% |
| Police promptly serve and enforce PFA orders   | 26.3%    | 15.8%   | 57.9% | 55.6%    | 33.3%   | 11.1% |
| <b>OTHER</b>   |          |         |       |          |         |       |
| Lawyers here understand DV laws  | 42.1%    | 36.8%   | 21.1% | 28.6%    | 28.6%   | 42.9% |
| Prosecutors here appropriately handle DV cases   | 31.6%    | 42.1%   | 26.3% | 14.3%    | 28.6%   | 57.1% |
| Lawyers here understand SA laws  | 42.9%    | 33.3%   | 23.8% | 25.0%    | 25.0%   | 50.0% |
| Prosecutors here appropriately handle SA cases   | 42.9%    | 19.0%   | 38.1% | 14.3%    | 28.6%   | 57.1% |

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The typical urban DV client was also a female under age 35. However, less than 25 percent were married or cohabitating, less than 10 percent had children, and 13 percent were low income.

The typical rural SA client, according to the survey, was female. Forty-four percent were under age 22 and 31 percent were married or cohabitating. Thirty-nine percent of the rural SA clients had dependent children and 62 percent were low-income.

The typical urban SA client was a female between the ages of 22 and 54. Less than 4 percent of these individuals were married or cohabitating and about 7 percent had dependent children. Thirty-eight percent of the clients were low-income.

Although the typical rural client was female, males made up 5 percent of the rural DV clients and 16 percent of the rural SA clients. Males made up 5 percent of urban DV clients and 14 percent of urban SA clients.

Persons who were gay, lesbian, or transgendered comprised less than 2 percent each of the rural DV and SA clients. Among urban agencies, these persons made up less than 1 percent of the DV clients and 3 percent of the SA clients.

A relatively high percentage of rural clients were adult survivors of childhood abuse. According to the rural agencies, 36 percent of the DV clients and 24 percent of the SA clients were abused during childhood. Among urban agencies, 13 percent of the DV clients were abused during childhood, as were 29 percent of the SA clients.

According to rural agencies, 25 percent of the DV clients had a history of substance abuse, as did 34 percent of the SA clients. Urban agencies said 8 percent of the DV clients and 9 percent of SA clients had a history of substance abuse.

Among the rural agencies, there was a 35 percent increase in the number of DV clients and a 67 percent increase in the number of SA clients between 2002 and 2003. Among urban agencies, there was a 60 percent increase in the number of DV clients and a 38 percent increase in the number of SA clients during the same period.

### **Reporting Experience**

According to rural DV directors, 33 percent of their clients reported their victimization experience to the police. Urban DV directors said 50 percent of their clients reported their experience to the police.

Rural SA directors said 25 percent of their clients reported their experience to the police, while urban

SA directors said 35 percent of their clients reported their experience to the police.

According to rural SA directors, only 10 percent of clients chose to press charges against the alleged violators or otherwise continue their case. Urban SA directors said 25 percent of their clients chose to press charges. Rural DV directors said 23 percent of their clients pressed charges, and urban DV directors said 20 percent of their clients pressed charges against the alleged violators.

### **Use of Services**

The typical rural DV client stayed in a resident shelter for 18 days and remained an active user of the services for 30 days. A typical urban client stayed in a residential shelter for 23 days, and remained an active user of services for 65 days.

The typical rural SA client, according to the directors, remained in the shelter for two days and remained an active user of services for 105 days. The typical urban SA client actively used services for 120 days. No information was provided on how long the typical urban client remained in the shelter.

The most commonly used rural agency services were counseling (62 percent); legal accompaniment/advocacy (58 percent); and medical accompaniment/advocacy (27 percent). Among the services not directly offered by rural agencies were drug and alcohol services; mental health services and family planning. The majority of rural agencies (85 percent), however, provided information and referral to clients for these types of services.

Where do clients go when they leave the shelter? According to the rural directors, 35 percent of clients were believed to have returned to the prior home setting; 18 percent probably moved in with family or friends and 30 percent probably relocated to a new home setting or relocated out of the area.

Urban directors indicated that 28 percent of their clients probably returned to their prior home setting and 17 percent moved in with families or friends. Forty three percent are believed to have relocated into a new home setting or to have moved out of the area.

### **Discussion**

According to the survey results, rural service agencies face many challenges, the most notable of which are financing and community awareness.

## **Financing**

Rural agencies spent \$100 more per client than urban agencies. Among the reasons identified for the higher costs were geography and related transportation costs and the purchasing and maintenance of equipment and supplies. In addition to higher expenses, rural agencies also receive less in-kind support and have less diverse revenue streams.

## **Community Awareness**

Fifty-eight percent of the rural directors said the level of public awareness of their work and the issues was poor to average. In addition, 41 percent of rural directors said that general public support of their agency's work and goals was low to moderate. Research suggests that this lukewarm awareness and support may be caused by a variety of factors, such as a culture of secrecy that discourages victims from reporting the crime or seeking help as well as the resistance of community leaders to recognize that rape and battery are serious crimes in their community<sup>1</sup>. Low community awareness may negatively result in low financial giving, contributing to a downward spiral where the agency is unable to get its message out because of a lack of resources. According to 81 percent of the directors, the most significant barrier to increasing awareness of their work and issues among the public was a lack of funding.

Another finding from the survey is that rural and urban directors have different opinions on how DVA and SA cases are handled by various public and private institutions.

According to the survey, rural directors have more concerns with the way the police and medical professionals handle DV and SA clients than their urban counterparts. Specifically, they were concerned about the way the police made DV arrests, their ability to identify signs of SA and their enforcement of SA laws. They were equally concerned with the ability of doctors and nurses to identify likely DV victims.

However, urban directors were more concerned with judges ensuring fair and expedient DV proceedings and with the courts in understanding DV and SA laws and PFA orders.

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<sup>1</sup> Ruback, Barry and Menard, Kim. "Rural-Urban Differences in Sexual Victimization and Reporting: Analysis of UCR and Crisis Center Data." *Criminal Justice and Behavior*. Vol. 28 No.2, April 2001.

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The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy within the Pennsylvania General Assembly. It was created in 1987 under Act 16, the Rural Revitalization Act, to promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities.

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