



Social Planning Council Oxford
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The prevalence of violence against women and girls is notably higher in rural areas compared to urban centres (Statistics Canada, 2018).

In February 2020, Domestic Abuse Services Oxford (DASO) hired Social Planning Council Oxford (SPCO) to complete background research on rural barriers to accessing domestic abuse services to answer the question.....

What Are the Barriers Rural Women Face When Accessing Domestic Abuse Services in Oxford County?

To answer this question, the researchers:

- Reviewed the existing literature
- Interviewed 26 stakeholders (staff from local organizations and women with lived experience)

Here is what they found.....

STRENGTHS in Oxford County

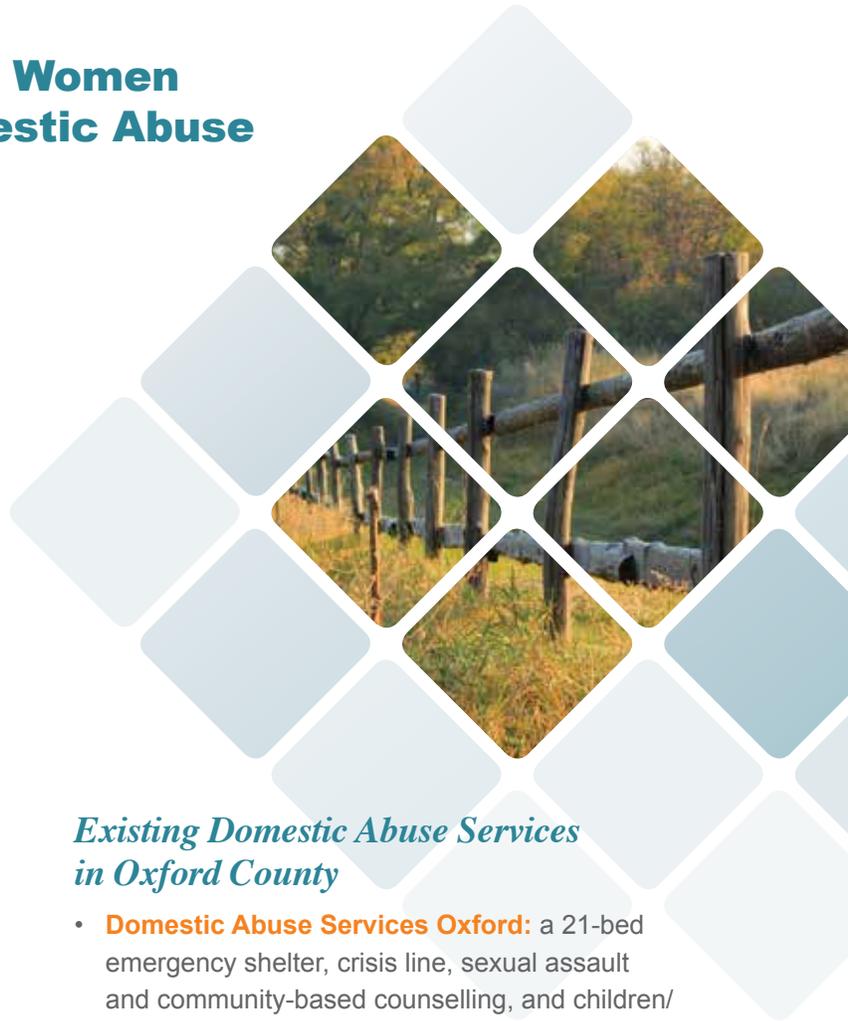
- **Formal and informal collaboration between services**
- **Perceived support and helpfulness of services**
- **Variety of services and options**
- **Establishment of trusting relationships with the community and outreach efforts**
- **Creative solutions and advocacy efforts**

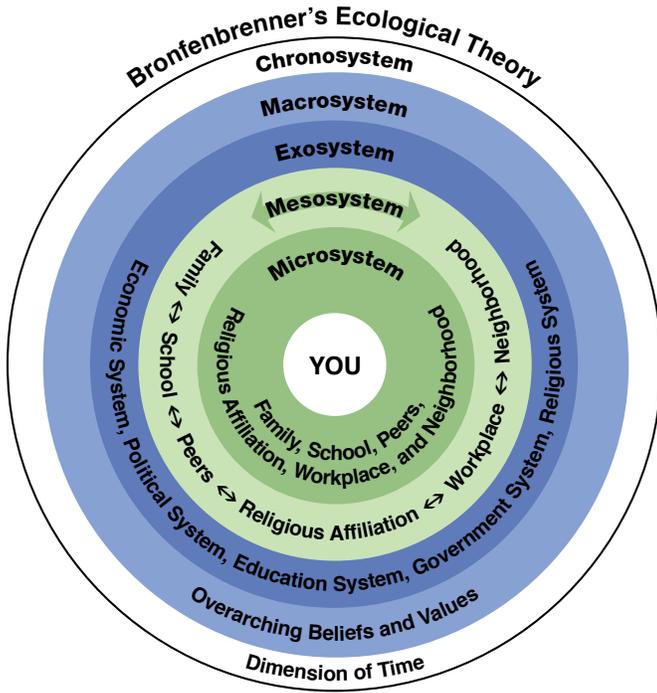
Strengths in rural work better together; more supportive than larger urban centre. The culture is not as rushed, partnerships can be easier to develop due to challenges. We share services due to lack of funds. We do well in Oxford. We have mutual clients, colocation, client centres. We consult with other organizations. Easier than urban where it can be more competitive. [service provider]



Existing Domestic Abuse Services in Oxford County

- **Domestic Abuse Services Oxford:** a 21-bed emergency shelter, crisis line, sexual assault and community-based counselling, and children/adolescent programming
- **Ingamo Homes:** safe housing units, counselling and support for women and their children who have left violence
- **Family Violence Counselling Program:** works with victims of abuse to identify and address issues of violence within the family system with a focus on safety and healthy relationships





General Rural Barriers to Accessing Services Found in the Literature

- Geography
- Rural ethics and character (tied to traditional gender roles)
- Community complacency
- Limited access to services and information
- Lack of anonymity
- Safety issues linked to geographical location

BARRIERS in Oxford County

Barriers noted in the interviews were organized into Individual, Community and System level categories using Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory dividing our environment into levels of influence.

These include barriers to seeking help, while seeking help and after seeking help. Each level of our environment impacts the other, all levels affect the individual and the barriers are interconnected and rurality can compound the other barriers that would exist for any woman seeking support. Themes emerged, however, each woman has a unique story, pathway and set of barriers.

Individual Level Barriers

- Influences of cultural factors
- Access to transportation
- Perceptions of domestic abuse and knowledge of available services
- Fears/concerns
- Ties to home/community
- Financial barriers
- Language barriers
- Shame/internalized stigma

- Concerns regarding confidentiality/anonymity
- Stigma
- Influence of family and community

- Isolation
- Access to internet/phone

Community Level Barriers

System Level Barriers

- Limited availability of services
- Gaps in system design and funding
- Lack of housing/shelter
- Justice system (including police and courts)
- Lack of communication between services/silos
- Gaps in provider education/training



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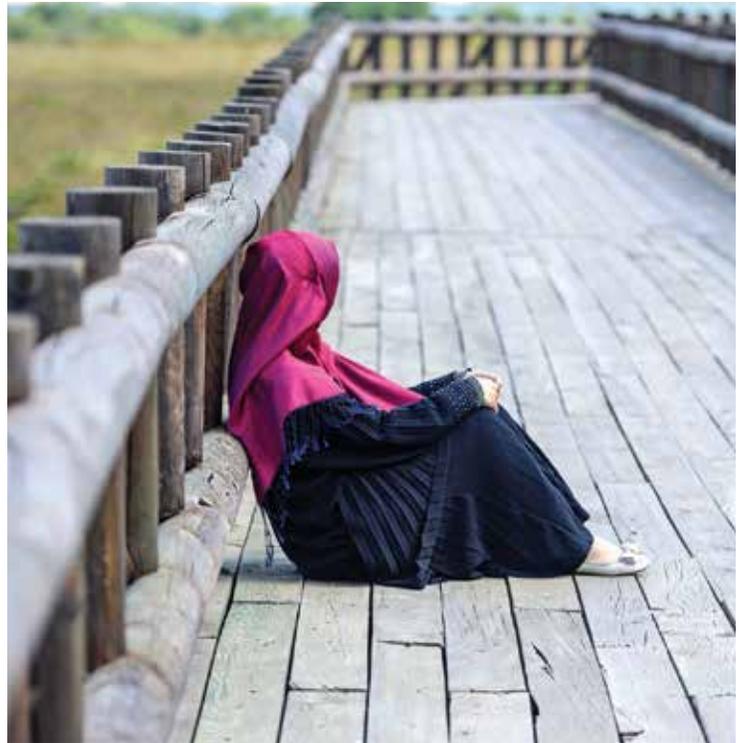
“He didn’t beat me, emotional and psychological abuse (not known or widely recognized). Before this, I didn’t think this type of abuse existed.”

[woman with lived experience]



“Fear of being alone... more prevalent in rural area. Harder in smaller rural area to be alone - more responsibilities.”

[woman with lived experience]



Groups Living in Oxford County That May Be Experiencing Unique Barriers

Cultural/ Religious Groups:

- Low German-speaking Mennonite women
- Newcomers to Canada/women with language barriers
- Indigenous people
- Religious groups such as Amish, Netherlands Reformed and the Muslim community

Persons with Concurrent/Complex Vulnerabilities:

- Women with mental health challenges and substance use, experiencing complex vulnerabilities and may not be eligible to access shelter

Other Groups That Were Named:

- Youth
- Persons experiencing homelessness
- Persons involved in the justice system
- LGBTQ identified persons
- The farming community
- Survivors of human trafficking
- Persons without access to transportation



Recommendations for Moving Forward

- 1. Increase funding to address barriers including beds, staffing and specialized services**
- 2. Strengthen partnerships and increase collaboration between services**
 - Areas to consider and assess for improvement include coordinated care between agencies for the individual, partnerships that are broken between agencies, and working collaboratively to address systemic issues
 - The 5 conditions of the Collective Impact model were suggested to support this recommendation: 1) common agenda, 2) shared measurement, 3) mutually reinforcing activities, 4) continuous communication and 5) backbone organizations
- 3. Work together to address systemic access issues**
 - Address issues such as the housing crisis and the possible development of a crisis centre for Oxford
- 4. Introduce further awareness, education and training**
 - For service providers and for the community in general
- 5. Changes to language/messaging of organizations (empowerment, non-judgmental, etc.)**
 - Agreement on uniform person centred terminology/ language
- 6. Changes to service delivery including process of communication**
 - Regularly seek feedback from service users, review policies/practices related to confidentiality
- 7. Practice cultural humility/open-mindedness**
- 8. Explore further current police domestic abuse services and practices**

Next Steps

- This is a starting point for conversations on how to move forward to address domestic abuse system issues.
- Some recommendations can be implemented without requiring funding such as internal reviews, while others will require further funding.
- Larger system issues will require collective impact efforts with commitment and ownership from all partners.

To access the full report please visit: www.spcoxford.ca/reports



This research project was made possible by funding from the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, (MCCSS) Rural and Remote Supports and Services.

SPCO is a non-profit organization in Oxford County that illuminates the realities of poverty and marginalization to shift understanding and inspire collaborative action for positive change. This is done through research, policy analysis, facilitation, awareness and advocacy. This research was conducted as a fee for service project - please contact SPCO at info@spcoxford.ca if you have research, evaluation or facilitation that your organization requires.