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Rural Versus Urban Victims of Violence: The Interplay of Race and Region

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This paper examines individuals who were victims of domestic violence in Illinois between 1990 and 1995, comparing the traits and service needs of those who received assistance in an urban county over the 5-year period with those who were served by domestic violence programs in rural areas. Analysis focuses on the demographic characteristics of clients in each region, their relationship to the abuser, type of abuse, referral source, and need for both concrete and supportive services. In addition to looking at variations by region, analysis examines differences between African American and White clients within and across geographic areas so that the interaction of race and location is highlighted. Results indicate that apart from demographic differences related to race, there is little difference in the circumstances of abuse when victims in the urban region are compared to rural victims of violence. However, those in rural environments regardless of race, have more service needs. Differences in service needs also exist in relation to race, and for some services, both race and location are important. The implications of these findings for policy, practice, and future research are examined.

KEY WORDS: domestic violence; rural service needs; urban service needs; African American victims of violence.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a social problem of epidemic proportions. Approximately 1.5 million women are raped and/or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, or date at least once annually; if repeat victimization, which is common, is taken into account, this figure jumps to 4.8 million (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000, p. 3). Since domestic violence was first acknowledged as a serious social problem in the 1970s, research in the area has proliferated (Gordon, 1996). As Gordon (1996) notes, many works have focused on the prevalence, causes, and treatment of abuse (see for example Briere, 1994; Dutton-Douglas & Dionne, 1991; Gelles & Straus, 1988; Roberts, 1998; Walker, 1984). Studies of the criminal justice and social service systems, and evaluations of innovative intervention strategies have also multiplied (see Buzawa & Buzawa, 1996a,b; Davis & Hagen, 1994; Davis & Smith, 1995; National Institute of Justice & American Bar Association, 1998; Reulbach & Tewksbury, 1994; Steinman, 1991; Syers & Edleson, 1992). Nonetheless, the research is more limited in terms of exploring variations in experience related to characteristics such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, or locale (for some exceptions, see Brandl & Raymond, 1997; Grossman & Lundy, 2003; Marsh, 1993; Short *et al*., 2000; Sorenson, 1996; Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994; Vinton, 1991; Websdale & Johnson, 1998). Either information about such variables is not provided or, samples tend to be White, heterosexual, and comprised of women from urban or suburban settings.

It is crucial to understand that no one is immune to domestic violence. Yet, service providers working with domestic violence victims must also understand how different environmental circumstances and personal characteristics can influence the victim in the service seeking process. Victims might have different experiences due to economic status, geographic location, family roles, community ties, and other factors. For both policy and practice

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purposes, it is critical that we understand these factors as they exist among these different groups and communities.

Toward this end, the current study looks at data from the population of individuals utilizing domestic violence services in Illinois, comparing two distinct regions, one urban and the other rural. While examining variations by region, it also looks at differences by race within and across these regions.

Literature Review

Websdale and Johnson (1998) point out that violence in general is more common in urban environments, a trend frequently explained by theories hypothesizing greater alienation and fewer social bonds among urban dwellers. Similarly, recent data on violence among intimate partners suggests that women in urban environments are more likely to be victims of violence than women in suburban and rural areas (Greenfield *et al*., 1998). Nonetheless, several authors (Feyen, 1989; Hilbert & Krishnan, 2000; Tice, 1990; Websdale & Johnson, 1998) argue that women in rural environments who are victims of family violence face special obstacles that are not present in urban settings. These include more conservative social and cultural norms stressing self-reliance, "standing by your man," and family and group loyalty; the belief among some rural subcultures that disciplinary violence is acceptable; greater physical isolation and terrain which makes it difficult to access services; limited public transportation; and lack of anonymity (Edleson & Frank, 1991; Feyen, 1989; Fiene, 1995; Gagne, 1992; Hilbert & Krishnan, 2000; Olson, 1988; Tice, 1990; Websdale & Johnson, 1998).

Data from one study comparing urban and rural women using domestic violence services indicate that there is little difference between the groups related to the prevalence of various types of abuse (i.e. physical, sexual, and emotional), but the experience of abuse still differs in subtle ways (Websdale & Johnson, 1998). Thus, Websdale and Johnson (1998) note certain actions, such as disabling vehicles, unplugging and removing phones, or monitoring the car's odometer, have greater implications for isolating women in rural environments, increasing their vulnerability to violence in ways that do not apply in urban areas where public transportation and public phones are close by (p. 186).

Data also indicate that women in rural environments may have more difficulty than urban women accessing shelter services. Several authors note that the distance of programs acts as a barrier as does the reliance on police for transportation to shelter services (Feyen, 1989; Websdale & Johnson, 1998). Feyen (1989) for instance, reports that 36% of her rural sample lived 11 miles or more from the nearest shelter. In the same study, 52% reported that they had no access to transportation. Women in rural environments are frequently dependent on police for transportation to services, yet police, faced with shrinking budgets, must rely on fewer individuals to patrol greater areas leaving vulnerable women to wait long periods of time for police to arrive after calling (Feyen, 1989; see also Gagne, 1992; Websdale & Johnson, 1998).

The criminal justice system, which may be critical to battered women, may also operate differentially in urban and rural areas. While studies of police response to violence in settings that are not specifically rural indicate police may be unresponsive or inappropriate regardless of locale (see Gordon, 1996), the more intimate nature of rural networks may create special problems for rural women. Websdale and Johnson (1998) provide anecdotal evidence of women who were afraid to call the police because ". . . they knew that their abuser was socially networked with the criminal justice personnel and that little or no action would be taken in their defense" (p. 187; see also Gagne, 1992; Websdale, 1998; Websdale & Johnson, 1997).

Battered women have a variety of social service needs related to their situation. These range from supportive counseling and education regarding the cycle of violence, to financial assistance, help finding a job and/or job training, child-care and housing in order to leave the abusive situation (Dutton-Douglas & Dionne, 1991; Dwyer *et al*., 1995; Lein *et al*., 2001; Menard, 2001; Tutty, 1996). For women in rural environments, the provision of such services may be effected by their unique circumstances. Feyen (1989), for example, talks about the fact that in the rural Wisconsin community she studied, the nearest post-high school technological institute was more than 50 miles away. Others (Websdale & Johnson, 1998) report that the lack of anonymity makes rural women reluctant to access medical and social services. In addition, more limited resources in rural environments and frequently entrenched bureaucracies make it harder to develop innovative programs (Edleson & Frank, 1991; Tice, 1990) and to attract and retain competent personnel (Hilbert & Krishnan, 2000; Olson, 1988).

Race may also have an effect on service needs and usage. For example, Short and her colleagues (Short *et al*., 2000) present evidence that African American women in both rural and urban settings rely on support from family and friends more than social services to escape from abusive situations. This may be because they experience the formal service system as less helpful. Sullivan and Rumptz (1994), on the other hand, in a study of African American women who utilized a domestic violence shelter, found

that Black women tended to stay in the shelter setting for a significantly longer number of days than White women, suggesting a greater use of shelter resources. However, the authors ascribe this difference to institutional racism and the greater difficulty African American women face in securing the services necessary for survival outside of the shelter setting such as housing, income support, employment training and so on (Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994; also see Short *et al*., 2000). In rural settings, where resources are even more limited, women of color may be especially disadvantaged.

Race and location may operate together in other ways to create different opportunities and barriers to escape for battered women. For example, Black families are poorer on average than White families regardless of setting, but Black families in rural environments are the poorest (Horton *et al*., 1995), indicating a special need for income support among rural African Americans. In contrast, Haynie and Gorman (1999) report that urban women who are young and Black who do not graduate from high school face a higher poverty risk than similar rural women. This suggests that access to educational services may be especially important for this subgroup.

METHOD

The data for this study were collected by the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV), a not-for-profit organization whose primary purpose is to advocate for and assist service providers with domestic violence policy issues, and education and training at local, program, and state levels (Humm, 1996, p. 1). All domestic service agencies providing services and funded by the Coalition (50 agencies as of January, 2000) provided data on their clients to ICADV using standardized forms. The analysis presented here focuses only on data from the Adult Client Intake/Eligibility Form, which contained information about client demographics, the type of abuse experienced, the relationship between the client and the abuser, and referral sources. In addition, the form had data about service needs at intake. Data were collected at intake based on both client input and worker assessments.[3]

The present study includes only individuals who entered the service system for the first time between July of 1990 and June of 1995. Earlier analysis of the data for the whole population of service users indicated very little variation in relevant client characteristics by year (see Grossman & Lundy, 2000). We focus on the first service episode. While each individual year does not knowingly contain duplicate cases, a somewhat large proportion of all clients (15.1%, of all clients, counting unique cases only) did show up in the data for more than one fiscal year. Future service contacts may have been influenced by previous ones for these repeat service users. By focusing on the first service episode for each client, we are able to control for such influences.

Participants

The total number of people receiving services for the first time across all regions between fiscal years 1990 and 1995, was 105,101. As the data in Table I indicate, almost 44% (to be exact 43.9%) of all persons served or 46,174 individuals received services for the first time from programs in Cook County while 18.3% or 19,239 received services from programs in rural counties. Census data indicates that during this same time period, 46.6% of the population resided in Cook County and 14.9% resided in rural regions (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, Population Division, August, 2000). Data on the number of agencies providing services indicate that 16 agencies served clients in Cook County while 17 agencies were located in rural counties, often serving clients from more than one county.

Data on race and ethnicity reveals that there was much greater racial diversity among clients in Cook versus rural counties. Roughly 40% of all clients served in Cook County were White and African American, respectively. Almost 20% (to be exact 17.9%) were Hispanic. In contrast, 90.2% of all rural clients were White; only 7.4% were African American, and 1.5% were Hispanic. In both Cook and rural counties, only small proportions of all clients were Native American, Asian, or Biracial. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau suggests that there was an overrepresentation of African Americans and an underrepresentation of Whites among the client population in Cook County while the distribution of clients by race in rural counties was more similar to the distribution of racial and ethnic groups in the region.

[3] A review of the data indicated that there were inconsistencies related to whether workers provided information when clients did not need a service or fall into a specific category. Unendorsed or blank items, by default, became no responses when the answer to a question was a yes or no. However, it is likely that in some instances, information that was left blank was actually missing data. Since there was no way to make this determination, all missing responses for yes/no items were coded as no. This inflated the number of negative responses, and reduced the proportion of respondents who fell into the positive category. Nonetheless, we believe this is the more conservative approach since it does not incorrectly increase the proportion of respondents in the yes category. Variables specifically affected by this decision in the present analysis were the three variables measuring types of abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual abuse), and the data on service needs.

Table I. Racial Background of Clients Served in Cook and Rural Counties 1990–1995[a]

Variable	Cook County clients	As a percent of the population of Cook County 1990–95[b]	Clients in rural counties	As a percent of the population of rural counties 1990–95
Total clients served	46,174	NA	19,239	NA
As a percent of all clients (%)	43.9	46.6	18.3	14.9
Total agencies	16	NA	17	NA
Race	$N = 43{,}739$	—	$N = 19{,}076$	—
White (%)	40.1	55.5	90.2	94.9
Black (%)	39.1	26.4	7.4	3.2
Hispanic (%)	17.9	13.7	1.5	1.3
Native American (%)	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2
Asian (%)	1.6	4.2	0.3	0.5
Biracial (%)	0.9	No information	0.3	No information

[a] Comparisons of the proportion of Cook and rural clients in each racial/ethnic category, with the exceptions of Native American and Biracial, attained statistical significance using Chisquare at the .0001 level ($df = 1$).

[b] Data on regional population was derived from the U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, Population Division, (August, 2000).(CO-99-12) Population Estimates for Counties by Age, Race, Sex, and Hispanic Origin: Annual Time Series, July 1, 1990 to July 1, 1999. Washington, DC.

Analysis

Analysis focuses on differences between clients using domestic violence services in rural counties and those served by domestic violence programs in Cook County. The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, the State agency that funds criminal justice programs and oversees data collection on domestic violence, separates counties into four regions: 1) Cook County which includes the city of Chicago and the surrounding suburbs, 2) collar counties (bordering Cook), 3) urban counties (outside of Cook and the Collar counties), and 4) rural counties. Because of its size, Cook County is generally compared to the rest of the state. Urban and rural counties are defined by whether or not they are within a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). A geographic area qualifies as a MSA in one of two ways defined by the Bureau of the Census: if it includes a city of at least 50,000 population or if it includes an urbanized area of at least 50,000 population with a total metropolitan population of at least 100,000 (United States Department of Commerce, April, 2002b). In addition to the county containing the main city or urbanized area, a MSA may include counties having strong economic or social ties to the central city (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, April, 2002a). Based on this definition, there are 28 counties in Illinois that are part of a MSA (Cook, collar, and urban counties) and 74 counties that are not part of a MSA (in other words, rural).

Because Cook is the most urban of the nonrural counties, and is distinct from the other urban regions, especially with respect to racial diversity (see Grossman & Lundy, 2000), we focus on comparing individuals served by programs in this region to those served in rural counties. We also limit our comparison of clients in these regions to victims who were either White or African American. As noted above, other racial and ethnic groups comprised only very small percents of all clients in rural counties, making comparisons problematic. In addition, the proportion of clients from some racial and ethnic groups in Cook County was also very limited (see Table I). Thus, after providing an overview of the number, and racial and ethnic composition of victims in Cook and rural counties, we focus on four groups; White victims from Cook County, Black Victims from Cook County, White victims from rural counties, and Black victims in rural counties.

We first present a comparison of the demographic characteristics and circumstances related to the abuse for clients in the four groups and then focus on service needs. The analysis involves description and comparison of the population of service users in each region or racial group. Since this study includes the whole population of service users over the 5-year period, statistical tests, which are typically conducted to predict from a sample to a population and determine the extent to which differences in the sample represent "true" differences in the population, are less relevant. Rather, the question is whether differences between groups are meaningful in terms of their practical significance. Therefore, while we report statistical significance in the tables, we do not focus on this in reporting or discussing the results.

Table II. Black Versus White Clients—Cook and Rural Counties—Selected Demographic and Abuse-Related Variables[a]

Variable	Black clients in Cook County	White clients in Cook County	Black clients in Rural Counties	White clients in Rural Counties
Total clients	17,119	17,530	1420	17,206
Gender	$N = 12,234$	$N = 16,453$	$N = 1420$	$N = 1420$
Female (%)	98.9	98.5	97.7	97.0
Age	$N = 16,877$	$N = 17,182$	$N = 1415$	$N = 17,028$
Average age (range)	31.1 years (3–93)	32.8 years (3–92)	29.2 years (16–79)	30.9 years (13–91)
50 and over (%)	3.5	6.2	2.4	5.1
Marital status	$N = 16,714$	$N = 17,282$	$N = 1396$	$N = 17,059$
Never married (%)	46.6	24.7	44.3	17.7
Currently married (%)	39.5	55.8	41.0	59.5
Relationship of client to abuser	$N = 17,102$	$N = 17,500$	$N = 1420$	$N = 17,203$
Husband/Ex-husband (%)	40.0	60.0	41.5	62.6
Male/Ex-male friend (%)	48.4	30.1	45.6	26.5
Father or male relative (%)	5.5	5.3	3.8	4.2
Other[b] (%)	6.1	4.5	9.1	6.7
Type of abuse	$N = 17,119$	$N = 17,530$	$N = 1420$	$N = 17,206$
Physically abused (%)	88.5	87.1	85.1	82.6
Emotionally abused (%)	93.1	95.9	96.5	98.1
Sexually abused (%)	11.6	13.9	16.5	18.3
Referral source	$N = 17,032$	$N = 17,395$	$N = 1416$	$N = 17,179$
Referred by Police (%)	51.2	39.7	30.7	31.2
Self-Referred (%)	5.3	7.0	15.8	12.2
Referred by social service agency (%)	18.2	15.9	10.2	11.9
Referred by State's Atty., Other Atty. or Legal Aid (%)	6.2	10.8	12.4	14.8
Referred by friends (%)	3.9	9.3	13.5	14.4
Referred by relatives (%)	1.2	2.7	7.1	6.9

[a] All comparisons, which involved one comparison of all four groups for each variable, attained statistical significance at the .0001 level using either Chisquare ($df = 3$) or the F statistic ($df = 3, 52,498$) for all variables included in the table.
[b] Includes "other" males and females, current or former wives, current or former female friends, and mother or other female relative.

RESULTS

Characteristics and Experience Related to Abuse

Table II compares White and African American clients in Cook and rural counties related to their demographic characteristics and circumstances of abuse. Data on gender indicate that across both region and race, the clear majority of clients are female while information on age reveals differences in region and race. In both urban and rural counties, African American clients are almost 2 years younger, on average and have smaller proportions of individuals 50 and over among their groups. In addition, African American and White clients in rural counties are younger, on average, than their Cook County counterparts.

Data on marital status and the relationship between the client and the abuser reveals that race appears to matter more than region with respect to these variables. African American clients are more likely to have never been married and White clients are more likely to be currently married, regardless of region. As we might expect, White clients in both Cook and rural counties are also more likely to have been abused by a husband or ex-husband compared to African American clients while the opposite is true regarding abuse by current or former male friends. Racial differences are almost identical for the two regions. Conversely, variations among the four groups related to abuse by fathers or other male relatives and "others" are generally small regardless of race and region, although Black clients in rural counties have a larger percent of persons in the "other" category. Further analysis indicates that most of the difference in this area is attributable to a larger proportion of African American clients in rural areas being abused by mothers or other female relatives compared to those in the other groups (3.9% of rural Black victims are in this category compared to 1.8% of rural White, 1.6% of urban Black, and 1.3% of urban White clients). However, the proportion of clients in this category, regardless of group, is very small.

There is little variation by region or race with respect to the type of abuse experienced. Overall, clients in Cook County were slightly more likely to be physically abused

while rural clients were somewhat more likely to be sexually and emotionally abused. The largest differences were between White rural victims and African American clients in Cook County. The former had the highest percent of victims who were sexually and emotionally abused and the smallest proportion of physically abused clients while the opposite pattern emerged among Black victims from Cook county. Nonetheless, despite attaining statistical significance, the largest differences between these two groups were not much greater than 6%.

The data in Table II suggest a more complicated pattern of relationships with respect to referral sources. Among African American and White clients in rural counties, there was very little difference related to referral sources. Further, compared to both White and African American clients in Cook county, victims in rural counties were less likely to be referred by police or social service agencies, but more likely to be self-referred or to be referred by a legal service provider, friends, or relatives. In contrast, differences related to race were more evident among Cook county clients. Thus, African American clients in Cook County were more likely to be referred to programs by police (51.2%) compared to White clients in Cook County (39.7%). Indeed, much of the difference between Cook and rural county clients related to police referrals can be attributed to the greater proportion of Cook County African American clients in this category. African American clients in Cook County were also less likely to be referred to programs by friends or legal sources, compared to White clients in Cook County. Other differences between the African American and White clients in Cook County were smaller.

Client Service Needs

Data on client service needs (Table III) indicates that for both regions, the largest proportion of clients had two specific service needs: personal/emotional support and legal assistance. While the proportions of clients with these needs was high among all groups, compared to those in rural counties, smaller proportions of Black and White clients in Cook County needed these supports. In addition, although a smaller percentage of clients needed these services, the data indicate that twice the proportion of Black and White clients in rural counties needed transportation and education/training compared to their counterparts in Cook county. Rural clients also appeared to need all of the other services with the exception of medical/physical assistance and employment more than urban clients and both White and Black rural clients had a greater average number of service needs at intake.

Despite these regional variations, racial differences also existed with respect to a number of services. Thus, while 78.2% of all White clients in Cook County needed emotional support at intake, only slightly more than half of all African American clients in this region had this need (54.9%). Indeed, much of the regional difference in this category can be attributed to the lower need of this group. African American clients in Cook County were also the least likely to be in need of legal assistance (46.9%) compared to the other three groups, but differences within the region were smaller (55.0% of White clients in Cook County had this need) than differences between African American clients across regions (62.5% of African Americans in rural counties needed legal assistance). Further, African American clients in rural counties had less need for legal assistance than White clients in this region (71.3%).

Similarly, although rural clients had a greater need for education/training and transportation than urban clients in either racial group, there was also a notable difference between White and Black clients in rural counties related to these services; 17.1% of all African American clients in rural counties versus 10.8% of White clients needed education/training at intake and 18.5% of African American clients needed transportation compared to 10.7% of White rural victims.

The data also indicate that in both Cook and rural counties, African American clients had a greater need for shelter/emergency housing and housing assistance than White clients. African American clients were also more likely to need medical/physical assistance, compared to White clients, but the largest difference in this area existed among African American clients in Cook county. Ten percent of all clients in this group needed medical or physical help at the time of intake while smaller percentages of clients from the other groups had this need. Finally, differences among the groups related to services such as child/family and financial assistance as well as employment and "other services" showed little variation by race.

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to explore variations by race and region in the characteristics, circumstances, and service needs of domestic violence victims. While building on previous comparative studies, our goal was to enrich the knowledge base by examining variations in race both within and across regions.

Our findings are limited by the fact that the population is characterized by individuals seeking help. Research indicates that victims of intimate partner violence

Table III. Black Versus White Clients—Cook and Rural Counties—Service Needs at Intake

Variable	Black clients in Cook County	White clients in Cook County	Black clients in rural counties	White clients in rural counties[a]
Service needs at intake	$N = 17{,}119$	$N = 17{,}530$	$N = 1420$	$N = 17{,}206$
Needing shelter/emergency housing (%)	28.5	18.7	36.0	19.7
Needing housing assistance (%)	17.5	8.3	21.7	13.7
Needing medical/physical assistance (%)	10.3	3.7	5.6	3.6
Needing personal/emotional support (%)	54.9	78.2	91.4	94.5
Needing child/family assistance (%)	15.0	12.2	18.3	21.5
Needing financial assistance (%)	9.2	6.0	11.1	10.5
Needing legal assistance (%)	46.9	55.0	62.5	71.3
Needing transportation (%)	6.7	3.2	18.5	10.7
Needing employment (%)	5.5	3.5	5.1	4.1
Needing education/training (%)	4.2	4.6	17.1	10.8
Needing "Other Services" (%)	3.7	5.0	6.8	10.4
Average number of service needs at intake	2.03 services	1.98 services	2.94 services	2.7 services

[a] All comparisons, which involved one comparison of all four groups for each variable, attained statistical significance at the .0001 level using either Chisquare ($df = 3$) or the F statistic ($df = 3, 53{,}271$) for all variables included in the table.

who use programs differ from those who do not to the extent that they tend to experience more abuse (Straus & Gelles, 1995). Nonetheless, because all individuals who used state-funded services were included[4], it is clearly representative of this population and can suggest areas in the service system that need attention and/or additional resources. The extent to which Illinois is similar to other states is unclear. State administrations have been typically conservative and funding for social services in general, particularly child welfare and income support programs, is somewhat restricted compared to other more generous states (see, for example, Children's Defense Fund, 2000). Despite the existence of a large urban city like Chicago, much of the state is rural. Indeed, many of the Illinois counties that do not meet the specific criteria for rural designation used by the Census Bureau include portions that are typically more rural than urban in nature. The degree to which these findings apply to other states then, may be limited. Nonetheless, the findings have important implications that should be explored in other settings.

Other limitations relate to the nature of the data and the way in which it was collected. Asking about broad categories of service need does not provide information about the nuances or meanings attached to those categories. Emotional support, for instance, may mean many things from formal counseling to informal support groups. Similarly, our measures of abuse are broad and may not detect subtle difference in the nature of abuse experienced. Qualitative data would help to enrich the picture presented here. In addition, because of the small number of victims who were other ethnicities and races in rural environments, our analysis of differences by race focused only on African American and White clients. Other persons of color may have different experiences warranting further investigation.

While information about service use does not reflect the extent to which domestic violence exists in either region, it does not appear that victims of violence who seek help from programs in Cook County or rural counties are overrepresented among the population residing in each region. Approximately 44% of all persons using services for the first time over the 5 years were from Cook County while 46.6% of the state population resided in this region. The same is primarily true in rural regions; 18.3% of all service users were served by programs in rural counties while individuals living in rural areas comprised 14.9% of the state population between 1990 and 1995. Further, the representation of persons of color among the service using population in rural areas is similar to their representation in the rural population of the state. In Cook County, African American and Hispanic clients tend to be overrepresented among service users, while Asian clients are somewhat underserved.

Although some authors note that urban victims tend to include fewer currently married women than victims in rural settings (Websdale & Johnson, 1998), we did not find this pattern after controlling for race. Thus, differences in marital status by region appear to be related to the larger percentage of unmarried women among African

[4] Donnelly and her colleagues (Donnelly *et al*., 1999) also note that individuals who use state funded programs tend to differ from those who use more informal services such as safe houses or privately funded programs to the extent that the latter are more likely to serve women of color and immigrant women. The extent to which such programs were in operation in Illinois during the years of this study is not known.

American service users in both rural and urban settings and the greater number of African American women in urban areas. The data presented here suggest that there are unmarried women among victims of violence in rural environments and their differing needs must be taken into account. Further, although the percent involved is quite limited, compared to the other groups, a very small proportion of rural African American victims appear to be abused by female relatives. Whether these are cases of child abuse that end up in the shelter system because other alternatives are unavailable or cases of adult abuse is unclear and warrants further investigation.

In both rural and urban areas, emotional and physical abuse appear to be quite prevalent. While reports are unsubstantiated, even if half are founded, the percent of women experiencing these types of abuse remains quite high. Sexual abuse apparently occurs less often, but it may also be that women are less likely to report such abuse. For example, Websdale and Johnson (1998) note that although there was not clear evidence of greater sexual abuse among their sample of rural women, analysis of specific types of sexual abuse indicated that rural women were more likely to report using sex as a way to stave off abuse compared to urban women. Victims may not report such actions as abuse. There is some slight indication that sexual abuse is more common in rural settings and physical abuse more likely in Cook County, but differences between the regions and racial groups, although statistically significant, are not very large.

Referral patterns appear to differ in some instances by both race and region. In general, there are few variations in referral sources by race in rural counties. White and Black women in this area tend to enter the service system in the same way. Compared to women in Cook County, they are more likely to enter through self-referral, a legal source, or referral from a friend. And even though the percent involved is small, they are also more likely to be referred by relatives. Conversely, they are less likely to enter via referral from a social service agency. This pattern fits with the more limited availability of social services in rural areas as well as the previously reported wariness of battered women to use such services for fear that their anonymity will be compromised. Further, it seems to reflect the pattern of greater dependence on family or friends as resources and the stereotype of "self-reliance" associated with individuals in rural settings.

It is unclear why legal sources should be utilized more often in rural settings. It is possible that rural women are more likely to approach legal service providers before they contact police, especially if they are concerned that the police know and support their abusers as some works suggest (Websdale & Johnson, 1997, 1998).

Clearly, the police remain an important referral source regardless of region. However, both African American and White women in rural counties were less likely to use this source. We can speculate that this may be due to the more limited availability of police to intervene as well as some of the previously noted concerns about inappropriate or unhelpful police responses. White and Black women in Cook County differed more in their likelihood of referral from this source. White women in Cook County were referred by this source in about 40% of all cases while slightly more than half of all African American women entered service after a police referral. This is in keeping with national studies that indicate African American women are more likely to call the police compared to White women and other minorities (Greenfield *et al*., 1998). However, it is striking that this pattern did not emerge in rural settings as well. Perhaps the difficulties of police assistance in situations of family violence in rural counties transcend racial norms related to utilizing police as a resource.

As anticipated, the percentage of requested service needs varied depending on the group of victims. In some cases, the differences paralleled previous results, but not always. In addition, some trends suggest areas that need further research.

The service need requested most often by domestic violence victims was emotional support. This was so regardless of group, but there were some differences. An overwhelming majority of rural victims, including both Black and White victims, needed emotional support. And even though victims of abuse in Cook County overall had less need for emotional support, the percentage of White victims was far greater than the percentage of Black victims with the same need. There are several possible explanations for these trends. Due to the high degree of isolation most rural women experience, they may need extra personal support from professionals around domestic violence issues, regardless of race. Websdale and Johnson (1998) talk about the culture of rural patriarchy and the power imbalance that rural women face. This may mean that domestic violence professionals in rural areas are some of the few people who understand the dynamics of power and control in domestic violence situations.

The literature suggests the Black community is typically close knit and that members often rely heavily on one another for support and guidance (Huang & Gunn, 2001; see also Short *et al*., 2000). However, if this explained the lower need for emotional support among African Americans using programs in Cook County, we would expect to see the same trend among African Americans in rural settings. It is possible that the urban environment may engender more support for the Black community because

network members may be living in closer proximity. On the other hand, the personal needs of Black domestic violence victims may also be underestimated in the urban environment. Gondolf (1998, citing Coley and Becket, 1988) asserts that because Black women must survive in an environment of multiple oppressions, they may appear to be more assertive, more confident, and more positive about themselves and more resilient than they actually are. African American victims may present themselves in an overly self-sufficient manner that can sometimes be misleading for professionals. Clinicians or service providers may misinterpret these actions as the women not needing the same amount of personal/emotional support as clients of other races. If the Black victim did not explicitly state or show her need for personal support, the service provider could have easily missed it. It is also possible that African American women in urban settings did not believe the programs would help them and therefore, they did not ask for such assistance. Several authors, as noted, discuss discrimination faced by African American women in the service system (see Donnelly *et al*., 1999; Short *et al*., 2000; Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994). Perhaps such experiences make African American women less likely to ask for help. Black women in urban settings, where services are more plentiful may have more such experiences and thus be less likely to seek assistance.

The second highest service need of domestic violence victims was legal services. Region appears to play a stronger role in determining the need for this service than race; both White and Black clients in rural settings had a greater need for this service than their counterparts in Cook County. According to Warshawsky and Warshawsky (1983), rural residents are in greater need of legal services because they do not have as many pro-bono/free legal options available as in urban areas. Yet it also appears that White victims in our study needed legal services more than Black victims, regardless of region. Since the decision to file criminal charges in Illinois is left up to the State's Attorney (J. A. Ferguson, personal communication, July 15, 2002), it is unlikely that this difference can be explained by variation in the willingness of White and Black victims to file charges as some authors suggest (Donnelly *et al*., 1999; Sorenson, 1996). It is more likely that the difference relates to marital status. White women were more likely to be married. Therefore, they may have needed legal assistance to help in matters such as the dissolution of their marriage and custody issues.

Racial barriers may explain several other trends. Looking at region only, there was no strong evidence that rural victims of violence needed housing assistance much more than their urban counterparts. However, analysis of racial patterns indicated that Black domestic violence victims in both Cook and rural counties had greater housing needs than White clients in both regions. The same trend appears in victim's need for shelter or emergency housing. It is possible that these needs reflect greater barriers to accessible, affordable housing among Blacks, resulting from prejudice or economic injustice regardless of where they live.

Similarly, although only small percentages of all clients needed medical or physical help, African American victims required slightly higher medical attention than White clients, particularly in Cook County. Although previous work suggests that rural residents have more difficulty accessing health care because of the distance or more limited availability (Booth & McLaughlin, 2000; Nemet & Bailey, 2000), these findings suggest there may be other barriers to accessibility than distance. Indeed, our data suggest there may be barriers related to race in the urban environment as well.

It is also possible that some of the differences between Black and White clients regarding service needs were at least partially associated with income. Census data substantiates that rates of poverty are generally greater among racial and ethnic minorities, especially African Americans (Proctor & Dalaker, 2002). Because we had no reliable income data, we could not determine if income differences might explain some of the racial disparities, at least in relation to those services that appear to be more highly needed by African American clients, regardless of region. We note, however, as discussed below, that there was little difference between African American and White clients regarding need for financial assistance.

As we might expect, the service need for transportation was higher in rural communities than in Cook County. Cook County has a highly developed public transportation system, as most metropolitan areas do. However the biggest difference in this area was between rural Black and White victims. Black rural victims had almost double the need of their White rural counterparts for transportation and were almost three times more likely than their urban Black counterparts to need it. This leads us to believe that there is something unique about the experience of rural African Americans that creates greater barriers to transportation than for the other victims. The exact dynamics involved remain unclear, but our findings suggest that special attention be given to this issue among rural African Americans.

The same pattern was evident related to education/training services. Despite literature suggesting that education or training might be less important in rural areas because of the smaller number of available high skilled jobs (Haynie & Gorman, 1999), rural victims overall had a higher need for education and training than urban clients

and the need was highest among Black rural victims. On the other hand, there was little difference between any of the groups related to the need for employment. It is possible that this need was subsumed under the education and training category. Finally, as we might expect, rural clients had a slightly greater need for financial aid and for child and family assistance, but racial difference related to needs in these areas were small.

CONCLUSIONS

This research yields a number of important findings. First, differences in the characteristics and circumstances of abuse among clients in rural and urban settings are not very large. While the nature of the data obtained in this study precludes more subtle analysis of differences in experience, it does not appear that one type of abuse is more strongly prevalent in one region or another. Similarly there is little variation in the type of abuse experienced by race, although there is some difference related to the relationship between clients and abusers, reflecting variation in marital status among Whites and Blacks.

Second, there is evidence that victims in rural settings, although they do use police as a referral source, are less likely to do so compared to women in Cook County, particularly Black women. Whether this reflects ongoing fear of calling police or if it relates to a lack of police resources in rural settings is unclear, but it suggests a need for further intervention in improving police response to family violence, particularly in rural counties.

Third, given the greater reliance on family and friends as referral sources in rural settings, community education related to violence may be particularly useful in rural counties. Fiene's (1995) work on the social isolation of battered women in Appalachia suggests that many family members did not understand or believe their relatives' tales of abuse. Community education may be an initial way of addressing this problem and increasing the likelihood of linkage to needed services.

Fourth, rural victims of violence regardless of race need more services than those in Cook County. Whether this is because workers in rural setting are more likely to assess clients as being in need of particular services or because needs are greater is unclear. It is possible, as the literature suggests, that services are less available in rural settings, which explains the greater need. The literature also suggests that rural women who are victims of violence may not know about services that do exist or how to access them. Staff in domestic violence agencies may be their first point of contact with the social service system. Therefore, the ability of staff to provide linkage to needed resources in these settings may be critical.

The data also suggest that African American clients in urban settings differ from all other groups to the extent that clients in this group tend to need services, particularly the two most prevalent, emotional support and legal assistance, much less than the other groups. Whether this is because they are likely to be underassessed as needing help by workers or because they do not ask for it is unclear, but further research examining this pattern is warranted to insure that this group is not unintentionally underserved.

Perhaps most importantly, our findings related to service needs suggest that it is critical for researchers and practitioners to consider the interaction of factors in order to better understand the needs of women who are victims of family violence. While race appears to matter more for some services and region for others, race and region together also appear to be important; looking at service needs by region or race alone does not allow us to see these nuances. Further research, exploring some of the reasons behind the variations found here would increase our understanding of the mechanisms involved and how they operate differently for clients from different backgrounds, improving intervention and opportunities for all victims of violence to escape from abuse.

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