The effect of social and geographical isolation and remoteness on the ability of women to disclose, report, seek help and receive appropriate interventions following experiences of domestic and family violence.

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This presentation reports on a study that examined the experiences of women seeking help for domestic and family violence living in rural and remote places. The study aims to contribute to the limited evidence on how isolation impacts on women’s decisions to seek assistance and cope with experiences of domestic violence by analysing five data sets collected from Derby in Western Australia and Whyalla, Riverland, Mt Gambier and Murray Bridge in South Australia.

Five women were interviewed for the study from each site (Murray Bridge included six women, Whyalla included three) totalling 24 women. One focus group was held with managers and practitioners from each site, totalling five focus groups, including 16 mangers and practitioners from South Australia and eight from Derby Western Australia. A focus group was also held with regional managers of domestic and family violence services in South Australia (n=4) and the Kimberley region of Western Australia (n=8), totalling an additional 12 regional managers from across the States.

The women interviewed were asked about when they decided to seek help for domestic and family violence and told us about what was helpful or not to them. Women were also asked to reflect on their times of coping alone without support whilst enduring the violence and abuse. The interviews also included discussions about distance and isolation and its influence on their decisions to seek help and cope with domestic and family violence. Practitioners and managers were asked about the major challenges and successes of service delivery and to reflect on how their local community contexts and isolation shaped their work. Interviews with women ranged from 45 minutes to two hours. Focus group interviews were approximately two hours.

The preliminary findings will be outlined in this presentation which include accounts from women, practitioners, and managers across the five sites. An overarching theme emerging is the ways in which largely urban designed policies and programs can be incompatible with the needs and experiences of those living and working in rural and remote contexts. Therefore the adaptability of workers to the local environment to meet the needs of women seeking assistance is evident in the data. The findings also highlight how distance and isolation shapes women’s experiences and decisions about domestic and family violence. We conclude the presentation by pointing to some early implications of the findings for future policy.