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## Abstract

The extant sociological literature on male-to-female violence in rural communities reveals that the bulk of the empirical work on this problem focuses mainly on non-lethal physical assaults, such as beatings. Much more research on sexual violence is sorely needed. The main objective of this review is twofold: (1) to describe the current state of international sociological knowledge about male sexual violence against adult women and (2) to suggest new directions in research and theory.

## Keywords

sexual violence, rural, sociology, risk factors, patriarchy

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## MALE-TO-FEMALE SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: A SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

The extant sociological literature on male-to-female violence in rural communities reveals that the bulk of the empirical work on this problem focuses mainly on non-lethal physical assaults, such as beatings. Much more research on sexual violence is sorely needed. The main objective of this review is twofold: (1) to describe the current state of international sociological knowledge about male sexual violence against adult women and (2) to suggest new directions in research and theory.

### KEYWORDS

sexual violence, rural, sociology, risk factors, patriarchy

THE SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF CRIME and societal reactions to it is now much less urbanormative than it was 20 years ago (Donnermeyer, 2019). This is one of the key reasons why sociological research on male-to-female violence in rural and remote places has proliferated since the latter part of the last decade (DeKeseredy, 2019a). Yet, the bulk of the qualitative and quantitative research done to date by affiliates of this discipline centers mainly on non-lethal, in-person variants of physical assault, such as beatings (DeKeseredy, 2021a). Much more research on adult male-to-female online and offline sexual assaults is sorely needed (Wendt, 2016). This review essay describes the contemporary state of sociological knowledge about male sexual violence against rural women and recommends new empirical and theoretical trajectories.

### Sociological Sexual Assault Research in Rural Context

Though there is a small international body of research on the sexual abuse of adult rural women, most of the contemporary sociological knowledge has thus far been produced in the U.S. (DeKeseredy, 2021a), which partially explains why most of the contributions to the field reviewed here do not extend beyond this country. Prominent rural criminologist Joseph Donnermeyer (2019) supplies reasons for the conspicuous absence of published sexual assault data from other nations:

It is possible that little or no rural research was ever completed in those areas. However, it is also possible that both theory and research on crime in many rural regions of the world is so obscure as to be virtually unknown. Sometimes, the barrier is language. For example, Meng (2018) makes a compelling case that there is a “lost” literature about crime in rural China because it is in Mandarin, not English (p. 4).

It should be noted in passing that 44.29% of the world's population is rural (Macrotrends, 2021). In the U.S., roughly 57.23 million people lived in rural areas in 2020, compared to about 272.91 million who lived in metropolitan places (Statista Research Department, 2021a). Nearly 60% (50.8%) of rural U.S. residents are female (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The percentage of these rural women by race is as follows: Native American (54%); White (27.6%); other race or two or more races (17.8%); Black (13.8%); Hispanic (9.3%); Asian/Pacific Islander (4.9%) (Statista Research Department, 2021a). Moreover, U.S. rural communities have the highest marriage rate (51%), followed by suburban (50%) and urban places (44%) (Pew Research Center, 2018).

The above data should be read with caution because there is no best or uniform definition of "rural" in the social scientific literature and defining it is subject to much debate (DeKeseredy, 2021a). Furthermore, as Donnermeyer (2020) correctly points out:

The reality is that there is no such thing as a single rural sector within a country anywhere in the world, but rather a wide and varied collection of localities with smaller populations and population densities. No single word in the English language, or any other language for that matter, possesses enough linguistic power to encapsulate the multiplicities of rural realities; a diversity that likewise offers "interesting social laboratories".... (p. 19).

Not all rural communities are alike, but most U.S. quantitative studies of sexual assaults on rural women divide places into "urban," "suburban," and "rural" areas based on categories created by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Prime examples of such projects are secondary analyses of National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data done by Rennison, DeKeseredy, and Dragiewicz (2012, 2013). Their approach, albeit common, is subject to criticism for several reasons. One is that the OMB classifies metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) as "central city," "outside central city," and "nonmetropolitan areas" and this agency never stated that it is correct to draw subcategories from the standard unit it crafted. Nowhere in the updated OMB classification criteria are the terms "urban," "rural," and "suburban" used (Dubois, Rennison, & DeKeseredy, 2019).

In fairness to Rennison and her colleagues, there were no alternative ways of doing their research at the time they conducted their statistical analyses. The bulk of U.S. research done before theirs was qualitative and entailed semi-structured interviews with small samples of female sexual assault survivors (e.g., DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009), and many researchers claimed that the results could not be generalized to the population at large. The only way to respond to this criticism was to examine NCVS data and use its operationalization of place. Rennison et al. (2012) found that rural separated/divorced women report significantly higher rates of intimate sexual assault/rape than do their urban and suburban counterparts, and Rennison et al. (2013) found that a higher percentage of rural women, regardless of their relationship status, are victims of sexual assault. These were important findings and they helped fill a major research gap because there were no comparable national U.S. survey data, and this is still the case today.

International comparisons of rural, urban, and suburban variations in the prevalence of sexual assault are so far not available because large-scale, cross-national surveys like the World Health Organization's (WHO) Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005), the

International Violence Against Women Survey (Johnson, Ollus, & Nevala, 2008), and the European-Wide Survey on Violence Against Women (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014) do not report differences across and within the above three places. There are, nonetheless, a growing number of local studies that examine sexual assault in rural places around the world such as in Australia (Saunders, 2015, 2018), St. Lucia (Hayes, Dathorne, & Taylor, 2016) and Vietnam (Yount et al., 2016).<sup>1</sup>

Why have male-to-female sexual assaults in rural and remote places received little attention from the international social scientific community compared to those committed in urban communities? This is an empirical question that can only be answered empirically, and to the best of my knowledge, no one has crafted a study specifically designed to answer it. One possible explanation is that the urban-centric nature of social science in general influences this selective inattention (Donnermeyer, 2016a). It is also likely that massive federal, state, provincial and local-level government cut-backs also play a key role (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2018). Research funds are necessary to do original social scientific research and are difficult to come by, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is more, many issues related to sexual assault in non-metropolitan areas cannot be studied using quantitative methods and hence qualitative research is the only option, and it is time consuming. Increasingly, college administrators are demanding higher levels of productivity, which means early scholars have scant time to do original qualitative research. Additionally, there are inflated tenure expectations, and this is one of the main reasons for the recent increase in secondary quantitative data analyses (DeKeseredy, 2017; Nelson, Wooditch, & Gabbidon, 2014).

Regardless of why the prevalence, causes, and consequences of rural sexual assault have received little attention, there is still much work to be done, especially that which is quantitative in nature. Again, most of the research done to date is qualitative. Still, this type work has produced useful sociological knowledge about key determinants of male-to-female sexual assault in rural places. They are male peer support, the “good ol’ boys network, the patriarchal hunting subculture, and male consumption of pornography.

### Male Peer Support

Male peer support is a concept I developed (see DeKeseredy, 1988) and it means the multidimensional attachments men form to male peers who abuse women, provide resources that perpetuate and legitimate diverse types of abuse, or both. Male peer support for woman abuse exists in many places around the world,<sup>2</sup> but rural research on this topic is thus far limited to studying the experiences of women living in U.S. and Australian communities. In rural southeast Ohio, for example, DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2009) found that male peer support is a powerful determinant of separation/divorce sexual assault. Twenty-nine (67%) of the 43 women they interviewed reported on a variety of ways in which their partners’ male peers perpetuated and legitimated such abuse. Three types stood out: often drinking with friends, informational support, and attachment to abusive peers. Informational support refers to guidance and advice that influences men to physically, sexually, and psychologically

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<sup>1</sup> See DeKeseredy (2021a) for an in-depth review of the international literature on small-scale rural sexual assault studies

<sup>2</sup> See DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2013) for thorough coverage of the international literature on how male peer support contributes to various types of violence against women.

victimize their current and/or former female partners, and attachment to abusive peers is defined as having male friends who engage in these behaviors.

If male peer support is multidimensional, then so is sexual assault. A variety of sexually abusive behaviors exist on Kelly's (1987, 1988) *continuum of sexual violence*,<sup>3</sup> one of which is sexual harassment. In rural Australia, Saunders (2015) found that male peer support, or in her words *mateship*, is a strongly related to workplace sexual harassment of Australian rural women. What makes her study unique is that most male peer support studies in and outside of rural settings focus only on physical types of sexual assault. Saunders' project is also, to the best of my knowledge, the first rural study to show that male peer support for sexual harassment can "seep into" physical types of sexual assault (Ptacek, 2016). For instance, after enduring many incidents of workplace sexual harassment, a female miner she interviewed was raped by a co-worker whom she trusted.

### "Good Ol' Boys" Networks

Male peer support for sexual assault is also found within rural "good ol' boys" networks that include criminal justice officials (DeKeseredy, 2021a; Websdale, 1998). The good ol' boys network and male peer support contribute to high levels of *collective efficacy* that cause many rural women much pain and suffering. *Collective efficacy* is a concept commonly found in the urban studies literature and it is "mutual trust among neighbors combined with a willingness to act on behalf of the common good, specifically to supervised children and to maintain order" (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1998, p. 1). The "common good" in many rural communities around the world is a violent patriarchal social order specifically structured to oppress women (DeKeseredy, 2021a; Jakobsen, 2018). Consider what this rural Ohio survivor of separation/divorce sexual assault told DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2009) about her husband who was a correctional officer:

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 him in the newspaper or whatever, you know. I don't know whether that goes from the get-go, you know, on how we choose our police officers, you know, and so on and so forth. I mean, I know there's um, you are going to have these kinds of people wherever you go, but this was a whole community, you know (pp. 92-93).

The influence of the rural good ol' boys network also exists in Tanzania (Jakobsen, 2016, 2018), Canada (Ruddell, 2017a), and Australia (Wendt, 2016). Many rural criminal justice officials "know the man" (Websdale, 1998), and there are far fewer female police officers in rural areas than there are in more densely populated places. In the U.S., women constitute only 14% of sworn law enforcement personnel in metropolitan places and only 8.1% of these positions in small and rural agencies (Weisner, Otto, & Adams, 2020). Several of DeKeseredy and Schwartz's (2009) rural Ohio interviewees recognized this imbalance and this one, like some others, sees hiring more female officers as an effective way to break up the ol' boys network:

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<sup>3</sup> Behaviors ranging from nonphysical acts like sexual harassment to physical ones like rape exist on Kelly's continuum. For her, no harm on the continuum is viewed more serious than another.

Put more cops on the force because men have no compassion in these kinds of cases... And they really need to change the training for and teach these policemen what women are going through, how they are sexually abused by their husbands or anyone. But they don't know. They're all men. How's a man gonna relate to what a woman went through? The only way a person can relate to that is the same gender and that's why we need more women in the department (p. 107).

### Male Hunting Subcultures

There is a long-standing tradition of hunting in rural communities around the world (von Essen et al., 2016; White, 2016). Hunting, as Hall-Sanchez (2014) discovered, is also an integral part of a rural male peer support subculture that promotes and justifies separation/divorce sexual assault and other forms of woman abuse in her female respondents' southeast rural Ohio communities. She conducted an ethnographic study of a three-day hunting exposition in a small rural Ohio town, did secondary data analyses of 43 qualitative interviews done by DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2009), and interviewed 12 rural Ohio women in the same geographic area where DeKeseredy and Schwartz collected their data. Based on her findings, she asserts, "Male peer support in hunting subcultures coupled with the availability and access to 'legitimate' weapons creates a fertile breeding ground for woman abuse in some rural communities" (p. 495). She found that more than 50% of the women in DeKeseredy and Schwartz's sample said the main reason they did not feel safe at home was their partner's access to guns. This woman she interviewed provides an example of the relationship between male peer support and membership in a hunting subculture:

I was working at the hospital and he was just laid off and couldn't find work. There really is no work here for men who work with their hands so he just became consumed with hunting. It was like it was the macho thing to do in this town. He could go out and shoot things and feel powerful and then go out drinking with his buddies and brag about it. It filled the void because he didn't have to admit that he wasn't bringing home the bacon. No, he was still a real man 'cause now he could go out and shoot shit and come home and smack his woman around, take sex when he wanted. Yeah, I think that helped him get his balls back. He didn't have to feel bad about not working (p. 504).

### Male Pornography Consumption

Rural male perpetrators have patriarchal attitudes and beliefs, and their communities are patriarchal (DeKeseredy, 2021a; Saunders, 2015; Websdale, 1998; Wendt, 2016). It is not surprising, then, that male pornography consumption is strongly associated with sexual assault in some rural U.S. areas because porn is a symptom of patriarchy. Moreover, porn use is common among patriarchal subcultures of violence (DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2016), including the hunting subculture (Hall-Sanchez, 2014, 2019). And, like urban and suburban places, rural communities are riddled with porn (DeKeseredy & Hall-Sanchez, 2017). Related to this problem is that rural U.S. women are at higher risk of experiencing lethal and non-lethal types of woman abuse, including sexual assault, than women living in more densely populated places (DeKeseredy, 2021a; Rennison et al., 2013). Still, it is unclear from the studies reviewed here whether rates of rural porn consumption are higher than those in metropolitan areas.

Based on interviews with 55 rural Ohio survivors of separation/divorce sexual assault, DeKeseredy and Hall-Sanchez (2017) found that 41 had male partners who

viewed porn, and imitation was a major theme that emerged from talking to these women. In other words, men would use demeaning language and engage in debasing behaviors featured in violent porn videos. Such conduct is related to the fact that a routine feature of today's porn is painful anal penetration, brutal gang rape, and men slapping, pushing, gagging, choking, and pulling women's hair while they penetrate them orally, vaginally, and anally (Bridges et al., 2010; DeKeseredy, 2020; Fritz, Malic, Paul, & Zhou, 2020). Males, too, constitute most of the perpetrators in porn videos and the targets of their physical and verbal aggression are primarily female. What is more, female performers often show pleasure or respond neutrally to male aggression.

DeKeseredy and Hall-Sanchez (2017) found four other key themes: learning about sex through pornography; introducing other sexual partners; filming sexual acts without consent; and the broader culture of pornography (e.g., sex work and fetishes). As far as I know, these researchers are the only ones to have studied the connection between male porn consumption and sexual assault in rural locales. Hence, the results are not generalizable to larger populations. This is also the case with much of the research on rural sexual assault. Edwards (2015) reminds us that while there is sound research documenting the risk factors associated with the harms covered in this article, the extent to which these predictors are "differentially" related to male-to-female sexual assault in rural and remote places has yet to be determined.

What is known, however, is that rural men's pornography consumption and distribution can lead to other behaviors on Kelly's (1987, 1988) continuum of sexual violence, including sexual harassment. Saunders (2015), for example, found that pornographic images or "pin ups" are displayed in many rural Australian workplaces. These displays were present in 66% of workplaces where "pack-on-one" or group sexual harassment was a problem and in 37% of workplaces in which one-on-one harassment was prevalent. Adding to the trauma caused by such exposure were many cases of verbal harassment, obscene gestures, and physical types of sexual harassment (e.g., groping).

### Other Determinants

Any review of the extant sociological literature on sexual assault and other types of woman abuse in rural and remote places would be remiss if it did not state that research consistently shows that widespread acceptance of violence against women and community norms prohibiting women from seeking social support, geographic and social isolation, and the absence of social support agencies and public transportation are also key determinants (DeKeseredy, 2021a). Alcohol and drug consumption, too, contribute to male-to-female sexual assault in nonmetropolitan areas as they do to assaults committed in metropolitan ones (DeKeseredy, Dragiewicz & Schwartz, 2017; Dewey, Zare, Connolly, Epler, & Bratton, 2019; Saunders, 2015). There is also a growing literature showing that the emergence of rural-based natural resource extraction booms increase women's risk of experiencing sexual assault (Ruddell, 2017b; Ruddell & Britto, 2020). Some rural criminologists claim that the sudden influx of large groups of non-resident male workers creates *social disorganization*, which, in turn, increases rates of sexual assault and other crimes (Stretesky, Long, & Lynch, 2014; Wendt, 2016). Social disorganization is "the inability of a community structure to realize the common values of its residents and maintain effective controls" (Sampson & Groves, 1989, p. 777). There are researchers, however, who contend that it is highly unlikely that woman abuse became a new problem in boomtowns. Rather, they assert that



natural resource extraction exacerbates a pre-existing condition (DeKeseredy, 2021a; DeKeseredy & Donnermeyer, 2020).

Most of the U.S. sociological research on the link between poverty and violence is done in urban communities (Eason, Smith, Greenberg, Abel, & Sparks, 2017), but as Gallup-Black (2005) puts it, “the relationship between violence and economic hardship... defined by job loss, unemployment, poverty and population loss – can be just as pronounced in rural and small population areas” (p. 165). The reason for this is that U.S. rates of rural poverty are higher than those for metropolitan locales and this disparity has existed since the 1960s when poverty rates were first officially measured (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2020).

DeKeseredy et al. (2007) contend that many impoverished and unemployed rural men experience a masculinity crisis because they cannot meet the responsibilities of “being the man of the household and feel deprived of intimate and social support resources that give them self-worth” (Harris & Bologh, 1995, p. 246). Large groups of these men also adhere to the *ideology of familial patriarchy* (DeKeseredy, 2019b), a discourse that supports male domination and control in domestic setting (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Smith, 1990). These men, DeKeseredy et al. (2007) assert, deal with “masculinity challenges” by sexually assaulting their current and former female intimate partners and using other abusive tactics. DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2009) provide some empirical support for DeKeseredy et al.’s (2007) theory, but it has not been tested using quantitative data. Some scholars, though, posit that this “gendered phenomenon” has contributed to a rise in a variety of interpersonal violent crimes and substance abuse in rural U.S. communities (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014; Eason et al., 2017).

### The Current State of Sociological Theoretical Knowledge

The concepts of male peer support and *patriarchy* are integral components of the theoretical literature on male-to-female sexual assault in rural areas. There are varieties of patriarchy and defining it is subject to much debate within sociology and feminism (Ozaki & Otis, 2016). For the purpose of this article, following Renzetti (2013), patriarchy “is a gender structure in which men dominate women, and what is considered masculine is more highly valued than what is considered feminine” (p. 8). Two prime examples of theories that incorporate patriarchy and male peer support are DeKeseredy, Rogness, and Schwartz’s (2004) *feminist/male peer support model of separation/divorce sexual assault* and DeKeseredy et al.’s (2007) *rural masculinity crisis/male peer support model of separation/divorce sexual assault*.

One of the things that makes DeKeseredy et al.’s (2004) model distinctive is that it is the first rural-focused *middle-range theory* (Merton, 1949) of crime to be informed by feminism. Also, this offering and DeKeseredy et al.’s (2007) helped move *critical criminology*<sup>4</sup> from the periphery to the core of recent theoretical work on crime, law, and social control in rural contexts (Donnermeyer, 2018). And, the work of DeKeseredy and his colleagues is pushing rural criminology in general to devote more attention to theory construction (Donnermeyer, 2019). Since these two theories

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<sup>4</sup> Defining critical criminology is subject to much debate and there is no widely accepted precise formulation. For the purpose of this article, it is defined as a perspective that views hierarchical social stratification and inequality along class, racial/ethnic, and gender lines as the major sources of crime and the key factors that shape societal reactions to violations of legal and social norms (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2018; Young, 1988).

are reviewed elsewhere (see DeKeseredy, 2021a; DeKeseredy et al., 2017; DeKeseredy & Rennison, 2020; Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014), they are not reexamined here.

### Looking to the Future

Shifting towards new and safer futures for rural women involves igniting a fresh wave of sociological scholarship on male-to-female sexual assaults. Hopefully, the following suggestions will help achieve this goal. Some readers, for sure, will assert that this piece neglected to note that sexual assault not only occurs in the lives of adult women. Certainly, many female adolescents and young adult women are also targeted (Maier & Kennedy Bergen, 2019; Vagi, Basile, & Vivalo-Kantor, 2015), but there is a scarcity of empirical and theoretical work on the plight of those living in rural and remote places. One would also be hard pressed to find published research on the extent, distribution, and correlates of sexual assaults on rural women with different abilities. Furthermore, while there is a budding feminist sociological literature on sexual abuse experienced by other women “at the margins” (Sokoloff, 2005), such as lesbians and transwomen (see Guadalupe-Diaz, 2019; Messinger, 2017; Messinger & Guadalupe-Diaz, 2020), women belonging to these and other social groups (e.g., Indigenous women and women of color) are overlooked in the rural sexual abuse literature.

There is, especially in Australia, a rapidly growing literature on what Harris and Vitis (2020) define as *spaceless violence* committed by “unknown persons and those who ‘may’ be known” (p. 330). Major examples are technology-facilitated stalking and image-based sexual abuse that can target women anywhere they use electronic devices like smartphones or tablets. A prime example of such abuse are videos made by men with the consent of the women they were intimately involved with, but then distributed online without their consent following the women’s termination of a relationship (Henry, McGlynn, Flynn, Johnson, Powell, & Scott, 2021; Salter & Crofts, 2015).

Harris (2016) postulates that “Those who experience technology-facilitated stalking are in greater danger of being seriously or fatally harmed, and survivors who are geographically isolated are exposed to even greater risk when living significant distances from police and health services” (p. 83). This is probably the case, but as of now, there is insufficient empirical information on the extent, nature, distribution, causes, and consequences of the online victimization of women living in rural and remote areas (DeKeseredy, 2021a; DeKeseredy & Hall-Sanchez, 2018).

If there is scant research on rural women’s experiences with technology-facilitated violence, it is not surprising that there is a conspicuous absence of rural research on the cooccurrence of online and offline adult male-to-female sexual assault, and the same can be said about such research in urban and suburban areas (Harris, 2020). Almost all the extant literature on the overlap of cyber and in-person violence centers on adolescent bullying (Marganski & Melander, 2018). The intertwining of electronic and in-person assaults is an example of *polyvictimization*, which is experiencing multiple abusive behaviors of various kinds (Mitchell, Segura, Jones, & Turner, 2018). Research shows that many U.S. female college students are victimized by both online and offline variants of sexual assault (DeKeseredy, Schwartz, Harris, Woodlock, Nolan & Sanchez, 2019; Marganski & Melander, 2018). Therefore, there is no reason to believe that numerous U.S. rural women do not have similar experiences because the digital gap between rural and nonrural residents is rapidly shrinking (Pew Research Center, 2019).

A top priority is conducting cross-cultural surveys designed to test hypotheses derived from theories. Actually, quantitative studies of any type of rural woman abuse done to date have not tested theories. Instead, they focused heavily on rural, urban, and suburban variations in women's victimization (DeKeseredy, 2021a). What would also be beneficial are prospective and longitudinal quantitative studies because most of the few surveys administered to date are cross-sectional, which makes it hard to find vulnerability and protective factors associated with offending and victimization (Edwards, 2015). A salient exception is Dillon et al.'s (2016) national, population-based study of Australian women. Add to the wish list a longitudinal study of potential male perpetrators. As a matter of fact, there is a dearth of quantitative and qualitative data of any kind on rural male perpetrators of sexual assault (DeKeseredy, 2019a; Wendt, 2016). One deviation to this rule is Yount et al.'s (2016) survey of 522 married men in Vietnam.

Based on their reading of Foubert, Clark-Taylor and Wall's (2020) campus study, DeKeseredy, Stoneberg, and Lory (2021) contend that it is likely that abusive men engage in *polyperpetration*, but there is no conclusive evidence to support their claim at this juncture. This is another reason for collecting data from rural males, as well as from men living in urban and suburban settings. Male offender data will not only provide a clearer understanding of the number of men who abuse, but they will offer a better understanding of the number of assaults they commit and whether they are multiple types of different kinds (Foubert et al., 2020).

Sexual assault is multidimensional and that is why Kelly (1987, 1988) created the continuum of sexual violence and why I crafted the *continuum of woman abuse* (see DeKeseredy, 2021a). Located on the latter continuum is *corporate violence* against rural women. Corporate violence is any behavior carried out by high-ranking corporate executives, or other persons in authority within the corporation, which threatens the health and safety of employees or other people who are affected by that behavior. Acts of omission, in which decision makers refuse to eliminate known health and safety risks, are also examples of corporate violence. It is the impact the action has on the victim, not the intent of the act, which determines whether or not it is violence (DeKeseredy & Hinch, 1991).

Sexual harassment is a variant of corporate violence, as well as a form of interpersonal sexual assault, and female agricultural workers in rural places are particularly vulnerable to this harm (DeKeseredy, 2021a, Gaarder, 2013). Note that there are over 700,000 farmworker women across the U.S., and it is estimated that eight out of every 10 of them were targeted (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Poo & Ramirez, 2018). A few studies, too, estimate that U.S. rural female farmworkers are two to three times more likely than other workers to experience workplace sexual harassment (Pacific Northwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center, 2019).

*Militarism* is another crime of the powerful that puts many rural women at high risk of being sexually assaulted (Barberet, 2014). Kelly (2000) contends that the wartime sexual assault of women can be situated on her continuum of sexual violence and it is included in my continuum of woman abuse (see DeKeseredy, 2021a). Ponder what happened in western Sudan, a country with an urban population of just 33.2% (World Population Review, 2020). Thousands of women were raped during the war in the Darfur region that began in 2003 (Human Rights Watch, 2008; True, 2012). These and similar atrocities, such as those that occurred during the 1994 Rwandan civil war, are major features of *genocide*. Genocide is "the elimination, in whole or in part, of an entire group of persons, based upon that population's membership in a given category" (Mullins, 2019, p. 339).

There are probably more types of sexual crimes that rural women experience. The most important point to consider here, however, is that research in the field is not plentiful and this explains the dearth of theoretical work in the area. The next steps, then, are to use innovative data collection techniques such as administering victimization surveys to farmworkers, an approach used by Basran, Gill, and MacLean (1995) in their British Columbia study of rural Punjabi farmworkers and their children. Some examples of novel methods used to collect data in war zones include interviewing journalists who have access to military personnel and using satellite imagery to monitor land destruction and the movements of armies and displaced populations (Green, 2018).

Using the above and other methods will not only shed more light on rural women's experiences with crimes of the powerful, but will also help verify if rural rates are higher or lower than those of more heavily populated areas. It will also advance the development of new theories. Thus far, there are no sociological theoretical perspectives specifically designed to explain sexual crimes against women committed by political and economic elites in rural places. There is, though, a large theoretical literature on crimes of the powerful, but except for the work of Collins (2016), it is gender blind (DeKeseredy, 2021a).

Noted earlier, there is a strong emphasis on using elements of male peer support and feminist theories to explain separation/divorce sexual assault in rural U.S. communities. It is unclear whether parts of these perspectives effectively explain sexual assault in other intimate contexts, such as marriage/cohabitation. Moreover, again, not all rural places are similar. Therefore, it is also unclear whether the aforementioned male peer support models can only account for the experiences of women living in rural southeast Ohio. These offerings emerged from qualitative research done there. Hence, research in other rural places, including those in the Global South, is needed to ascertain if male peer support is a strong determinant of various types of male-to-female sexual assault in different rural and remote communities. As well, empirical work on similarities and differences in male peer support for sexual assault in rural and metropolitan locales is necessary.

No matter what types of new empirical and theoretical trajectories are taken, it is essential to resurrect the concept of patriarchy (Hunnicut, 2009) because, in addition to the fact that it is one of the most powerful determinants of all types of woman abuse, it has been marginalized in the field of woman abuse, especially in North America, over the past 18 years (DeKeseredy, 2021b). Furthermore, an international body of research shows that rural communities are more patriarchal than urban ones (DeKeseredy, 2019b; Evans, 2015; Harris, 2016), which partially accounts for why, in the U.S., rates of rural sexual assault are higher in rural areas than in non-rural places. We should never lose sight of individuals, but we need theories that explain how individual behavior is influenced by macro-level forces. That one in three women worldwide will experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime is a powerful statement on the need for policies and programs driven by feminist sociological work (Walby et al., 2017). As Websdale (1998) discovered in his ethnographic study of woman battering and the criminal justice system in rural Kentucky, "Any social policy initiatives must use the structure of rural patriarchy, in all its intricate manifestations, as an essential frame of reference" (p. 194).

## Conclusions

The research reviewed here helps dispel the myth that rural places are safer than urban and suburban locales. In fact, as Donnermeyer (2016b) notes:

a case can be made that there are many rural communities with equivalent and even higher levels of violence when compared to nearly all other localities, regardless of size, and whether this violence is measured by police records and subjected to quantitative analysis or considered from a more ethnographic and qualitative approach (p. 167).

The male-to-female sexual assault literature covered in this essay helps make this case, but there is much more empirical and theoretical work to do, especially outside the realm of the U.S. This is starting to happen (see DeKeseredy, 2021a), but the pace is slow and is likely to remain this way in the near future because conventional data collection methods (e.g., face-to-face interviews), such as those recommended in the previous section, cannot be used in many places due to strict social distancing measures caused by COVID-19 (World Health Organization, 2020). COVID-19 appears to have also triggered what United Nations (UN) Women (2021) refer to as a “shadow pandemic of violence against women.” UN Women’s claim is based primarily on female survivors’ calls to domestic violence helplines and their support seeking behaviors do not provide accurate estimates of the extent of sexual assault or any other type of woman abuse in any community. Until the coronavirus disappears or until most people become immune to it, researchers will have to rely on analyses of secondary data and use these techniques recommended by the World Health Organization (2020):

- key informant Zoom interviews with service providers and frontline workers;
- rapid assessment/mapping services;
- service-based data;
- qualitative data (e.g., case reports);
- media reports; and
- participatory data collection approaches (p. 4).

COVID-19, however, does not preclude theoretical development and there is always room for new speculative theories of male-to-female sexual assault in rural areas. Indeed, “speculation is the soul of the social sciences” (Lave & March, 1993, p. 2). Nonetheless,


It is necessary that the explanation is constructed in such a way that it is testable in principle. It should also be stated clearly that the proposed explanation is the result of speculation and, if possible, what type of facts are needed to fill the gap of information (Swedberg, 2021, p. 70).

Advances in the field also require revising older theories based on the accumulation of new data. Whatever sociological theories are constructed and eventually tested, the concept of patriarchy needs to again be prioritized because “it keeps the gaze directed toward social contexts rather than toward individual men who are motivated to dominate” (Hunnicuttt, 2009, p. 554). Further, this approach compels people to think about the “bigger picture.” To conclude, as Renzetti (2018) remarks, it also “raises public awareness, in this case of gendered inequalities, and... produces useable knowledge that contributes to the social reconstruction of gender and gender relations so they are more equitable” (pp. 75-76).

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