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# Challenges and Opportunities in Personal Assistance Services in Rural Contexts

Krys Standley, M.S., Rayna Sage, Ph.D., & Carissa Russell

## Introduction

- Little is known about the experiences of people living in rural areas who need paid assistance for activities of daily living in their homes.
- This study focused on how rurality and access to workers intersected with the daily and community experiences of people who rely on personal assistants for their activities of daily living.

## Methods

- n = 38
- Semi-structured qualitative interviews
- People who used personal assistance services and identified as living in a rural place
- 32 interviews were with care recipients; 6 interviews were with unpaid family members
- Interview topics:
  - 1) Finding, hiring, & training workers
  - 2) Worker qualities
  - 3) How living in a rural place impacted services

## Interviewee Characteristics

- Most participants were white.
- Age range: 22 – 90

## Discussion

Variations in rural contexts and culture need to be considered in service delivery and practice.

## Limitations

Participants self-selected into the study based on their subjective identification of living in a rural place.

# For rural disabled people who receive caregiving services, rural context matters.



## Findings

### Type of Rural Community Matters

For personal assistance users, living in a resource-rich community is easier than living in a resource-poor community.

- “ ...basically, we have nothing but a post office and a volunteer fire station. We don't have any other type of businesses.” (Native American man, 61, chronically poor community)
- “ The local economy, there's people that work in the mine, but most of it is little restaurants and a tourist-type environment. Most people travel out of town to work.” (White, Hispanic woman, 90, transitioning community)
- “ We're very lucky with having those colleges. The town next to us also has two colleges. That brings a wealth of activities to participate in.” (White woman, 61, amenity-rich community)

### Aspects of Rural Living that Impact Personal Assistance Services and Community Living

Receipt of personal assistance services in rural places is characterized by a mixture of barriers and opportunities. Barriers included transportation time and distance, local worker shortages, and difficulty finding accessible housing.

- “ That's the biggest drawback is there's no decent wage, no temp pool or whatever to pull from if somebody becomes ill or a death in the family...” (White woman, 54)

Opportunities included tight-knit communities and affordable housing.

- “ We've lived here for a long time and it's a tight community. People watch out for each other.” (White man, 27)

Some aspects of rural living are “double-edged,” having both benefits and drawbacks.

### Important Worker Characteristics for Providing Rural Services

Worker characteristics desired by rural consumers include personalization of care, respect (both for consumers' dignity and for their privacy), comfort with the slower pace of rural life, trustworthiness, and awareness that urgent medical care takes longer than it does in urban areas.

- “ The one-on-one good personal care. The loving, caring one-on-one. Someone that really cares about you and you can tell they care.” (White/Native American woman, 48)
- “ ...I think if you put too much information out there, you're opening yourself for either crime or someone stealing from you or whether it's identity or whatever else it. I just think that's a rural trait.” (White woman, 60)