PRISM is an acronym for the six analysis screens that were developed for the purpose of reflexivity⁴ or critical feminist evaluation⁵ of policies that address violence against women and girls in rural and socially-isolated communities. These policy analysis screens include:

- Naming Abuse and Violence
- Situating Girls’ and Women’s Experiences
- Living in a Rural, Remote, and Socially-Isolated Community
- Toward Women and Girls’ Personal and Community Safety
- Making a Difference in the Lives of Women and Girls
- Supporting Individual and Social Change

The PRISM is an evaluative resource designed to analyze the variety of rural women’s and girls’ experiences of violence and abuse in order to develop and evaluate policy responsiveness to local needs. However, these policy analysis screens are not rigid categories of analysis. Many of the issues raised in the discussion below fit into more than one frame. However, each enables us to see how policies, at both the program and government levels, are shaped by knowledge, institutions, and social and structural barriers.

In order to provide effective violence prevention programs in Atlantic Canada, policymakers must consider the unique characteristics of rural life, and the specific needs of women and girls who live in rural areas. Neil Websdale uses the concept of “rural patriarchy” to discuss how patriarchal relations are articulated in rural communities, and how these attitudes and beliefs subordinate women living in these settings⁶. Subsequent Canadian
Community members offer this program as a sign of positive change in their community: “This time people said, let’s sit down and talk about it . . . Last year students (would have been) beating each other up.” Rural Youth Education Project

studies have adopted this concept⁴. While the concept of “rural patriarchy” is useful because it identifies shared beliefs and attitudes toward women, it is important to remember that federal and provincial policies also influence local practices. The four Atlantic provinces have different social welfare protocols and anti-violence policies. Therefore, while rural and farm women and girls may share some experiences, different provincial practices influence their ability to access resources and services.

The checklist with which to inform policy action is based on theories of intersectionality to mediate the tension between commonalities of women’s and girls’ experiences of violence and the unique social location of individual women and girls. Intersectionality recognizes that a combination of systems of oppression operate together to sustain and reproduce inequality. An intersectional approach recognizes the historical, social, and political contexts in which individuals live. In turn, it recognizes that gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, age, intersect in particular ways to shape women’s and girls’ experiences of violence and their access to programs and services⁵.

The checklist distinguishes between the experiences of women and girls. Policies need to consider experiences of violence and abuse over the course of a woman’s life because the problems a woman has are often linked to her childhood experiences, her position within the family, and barriers and possibilities available to her⁶. Hence, it is important to maintain an analytical distinction between the barriers that women and girls face.

While the checklist adopts a feminist analysis of violence against women, there must be enough flexibility to incorporate women’s and girl’s definitions of violence and abuse and their ideas for change. There may be significant differences between decision makers’ analyses of violence and abuse and that of the women and girls who have experienced it. We need to be particularly attentive to differences in the definition of violence that are based on a woman’s or a girl’s social location.

Integrating considerations of each of the six analytic lenses into policy development, implementation, and reflection helps decision-makers to unravel the complex relationship between individual experiences of violence and the policy and practice decisions that respond to and affect them. This fact sheet describes each of the six analytic screens. Under each of these descriptions follows a checklist based on the findings from the PRISM research, as told to us by better practices and the girls and women who access them.
Naming Abuse and Violence

Naming abuse and violence in all of its many forms and how it is experienced in rural communities is key in developing or evaluating policies and practices to support communities in responding to their specific needs. A broad social context in policies that name abuse and violence enables all of us to understand the connection of interpersonal violence to social violence; that girls and women are not to blame but that violence and abuse is an effect of gender inequality. Naming abuse and violence is a key policy concern for the following reasons:

- Naming abuse is key to ending violence.
- The definition of violence includes all forms of violence.
- Woman abuse means different things in different places.
- Women and girls experience abuse and violence differently.
- Raising awareness continues to be necessary work; violence is still normalized.
- A broad social context in naming abuse and violence enables girls and women to understand the connection of interpersonal violence to social violence; that they are not to blame but that violence and abuse is an effect of gender inequality.
- Better practices and reflexive approaches continually push their own limitations.

Informing Policy Action Checklist for Naming Abuse and Violence

Naming and integrating naming abuse and violence against women and girls as policy requires an understanding of the issues, the contexts out of which issues emerge, and the voices of girls and women.

The questions become: How do girls and women name abuse and violence? How do service providers ensure that they effectively respond to girls and women’s social locations? How does government respond to effect women’s equality? Applying an abuse/violence lens helps policy makers understand how their decisions affect women and girls experiences, both of violence and abuse and whether and how it ends. The following questions can form part of a checklist for policy reflection:

- How does policy define violence?
- Did this definition resonate from the experiences of women and girls?
If we are bold enough to access services, we do not see ourselves reflected in the staff. There is a lack of cultural sensitivity. Things as small as hair care products are not readily available. Transition houses need to allow for perms, conditioners for Black women/girls in their yearly budget. AUBA Women’s Institute Black Women and Violence Project

Does the definition consider what makes it difficult to talk about violence against women and girls?

Does the definition consider how violence is minimized? Normalized? Mutualized?

Does the definition consider the various ways in which women and girls are blamed for violence and abuse? How does it address blame?

Does the definition acknowledge the different forms of violence?

How does the definition consider the different ways in which girls and women experience violence and abuse?

How does the definition focus on systemic issues?

Situating Girls’ and Women’s Experiences

Situating girls’ and women’s experiences in the context of our policies and practices involves examining how gender and social location shapes women’s and girls’ access to services and programs. Various systems of power and control operate together to sustain and reproduce inequality. Therefore, our policies need to consider the historical, social, and political contexts of individual experiences of oppression. Situating girls’ and women’s experiences is a key policy concern for the following reasons:

- Girls and women experience violence and abuse as an effect of gender inequality (i.e. conventional and expected roles and relationships, and both women’s and men’s feelings that they need to comply with them).

- Girls and women have sensitive language and literacy issues.

- Various unequal social relations affect girls’ and women’s choices, e.g. poverty and the tendency to attribute violence against women to cultural differences limit women’s and girls’ opportunities to leave violent relationships.

- An intersectional approach considers the historical, social, and political contexts of individual experiences of oppression.

- A gender sensitive approach not only allows the work of programs and services to remain consistent with women’s and girls’ realities, but enables them to take into account and work with gender differences in attitudes toward and responses to violence.

- Situating girls and women’s experiences involves bringing together different communities that have been divided traditionally.

- Sharing power with recipients in research, development, and
evaluation processes facilitates women self-empowerment.
- Beginning from and building upon girls’ and women experiences respects girls and women’s decisions.
- Women need social supports to see them through the difficult time of making change.
- Equality is a key component of ending violence against women and girls.
- Ending violence against women and girls requires a commitment from men and education efforts directed specifically toward boys and men.

Informing Policy Action: Situating Girls’ and Women’s Experiences

Situating experiences of abuse and violence and our responses to them within the contexts of girls and women’s lives acknowledges that the variety and uniqueness of realities, perspectives, and worlds that people bring to any practice, including policy, creates possibilities for reflection. It also recognizes that power and relations of power result in exclusion, and calls on us to challenge it.

The questions become: How do our policies embrace many voices and perspectives? How do our policies exclude girls and women? How are girls and women ensured that their social location is effectively responded to? Applying a gender and diversity lens helps policy makers understand how their decisions challenge/perpetuate the power relations that exclude girls and women. The following questions can form part of a checklist for policy reflection:

- How is inclusion defined? practiced?
- Do women and girls for whom policy is directed reflect the diversity of the area?
- Does policy address the diverse needs of women and girls in rural, remote, and socially-isolated communities?
- How does policy deal with the specific needs of groups of women and girls?
- What things are done to address accessibility?
- If policy does not address the specific needs of women and girls, what is the policy on where they refer them?
- Is qualitative participatory action research on violence against women and girls in marginalized communities supported? How?
- How does policy address equality? Constraints?
- Is there a social action component?
How are women and girls involved in development and evaluation of policy?

Living in a Rural, Remote, and Socially-Isolated Community

The political, economic, and social structures of rural and socially-isolated communities in Atlantic Canada shapes women’s and girls’ access to services. Although media and literature have constructed rural communities as places where people share the same values and identities, there are significant social, economic, and cultural differences within rural communities that affect women’s and girls’ day-to-day lives. For example, tense relations between First Nations communities and non-Aboriginal people have drawn clear divisions in many rural communities. The Indigenous African Canadian community has deep roots in Nova Scotian rural communities. Discriminatory practices have prevented Aboriginal and Indigenous African Canadian women who experience violence from accessing transition houses and safe houses.

Considering the dynamics of living in rural and socially-isolated communities enables policy makers and evaluators to better understand what strategies for change are most effective in rural and remote communities in Atlantic Canada so that women and girls are not obliged to choose between their personal safety and staying in their home communities. Considering the dynamics of living in rural and socially-isolated communities is critical for the following reasons:

- Women and girls living in rural, remote, and socially-isolated communities have specific needs related to geography.
- While rural and farm women and girls may share some experiences, different provincial practices influence their ability to access resources and services.
- Women and girls in the same family often have very different experiences because the girls have more connection to the town and mainstream institutions because they attend schools.
- Lack of anonymity and social isolation has unique implications for women and girls from marginalized communities.
- Women and girls from socially-isolated and remote communities must balance the need for confidentiality and services that are sensitive to their unique circumstances and their distrust of provincial services and programs.
- Community-specific programs reflect the community in terms of the...
staff/program deliverers and information available, as well as, sponsoring organizations.

- Women’s connection to one another is an important factor in women and girls’ ability to end violence and abuse.
- Sensitivity to women’s and girl’s working lives is key to their participation.
- Better practices and reflexive approaches are responsive to economic realities are rural, remote, and socially-isolated communities.

Informing Policy Action: Responding to rural and socially-isolated communities

Women and girls living in rural and socially-isolated communities have unique needs. Rural and socially-isolated communities are, themselves, unique contexts in which violence against women and girls occurs and is addressed.

The questions become: How do programs and services address the unique needs of girls and women and girls living in rural and socially-isolated communities? How do decision makers address the lack of/declining resources in order to sustain and build social and economic infrastructure in rural and remote areas? How do programs and services address the tremendous barriers on women and their communities to struggle against violence? And toward social, political, and economic equality? The following questions can form part of a checklist for policy reflection:

- Does policy address values, attitudes, relations and practices (individual, familial, social, institutional) work to support women and girls? That make it difficult for women and girls to seek support?
- Does policy address the ways in which access to financial resources affect women’s and girls’ ability to access programs and services?
- Is policy sensitive to women’s and girls’ working lives?
- Is policy responsive to the economic realities of the area?
- How does policy address social stigma, visibility, conflict of interest, privacy?
- How does policy support women’s connection to others while protecting privacy?
- How does policy address issues related to the social isolation of:
  - women and girls living in poverty?
  - Aboriginal women and girls?
  - Indigenous African Canadian women and girls?
  - New Immigrant and refugee women and girls?
The term "cultural safety" is borrowed from the research of Annette Browne and Jo-Anne Fiske (2003).

Toward Women and Girls’ Personal and Community Safety

Safety is a social responsibility. The most effective violence prevention and safety interventions are those which coordinate community resources to support women and girls who are dealing with violence/abuse. How policies create options and choices affects whether they work to reduce rather than enhance risk. However, the effectiveness of policy depends on a high degree of support from police, victims’ support services, counselling programs, and the criminal justice system. In rural areas, coordinating services is difficult because of the lack of resources, the lack of social services and the larger jurisdictions of police. Moreover, there may not be adequate resources in rural areas to address the specialized needs of particular groups of women.

Safety also means different things to different groups. How rural communities design programs and services to address girls’ and women’s social isolation affects the ability of women and girls to live violence-free lives. If girls and women do not feel safe accessing mainstream programs they may stay in abusive relationships. Moving toward women and girls’ personal and community means examining their options for self-determination and the risks that women and girls take when they disclose abuse. It means that:

- Safety policies and practices reflect the specific needs of the individual.
- Safety policies and practices consider the intersection of individual needs with the power of the group/individual.
- Safety policies and practices consider the rural context of women’s lives.
- “Cultural safety" training of service providers and decision-makers enables reflection on the structures in which they part.
- Emotional safety is maximized.
- Privacy is key to whether or not girls and women seek support or hide abuse and violence.

My guidance counsellor is my cousin at school. So I am not going to go over to him and talk about my problems. He is related to me. So then it is like just because you don’t hear about things, it doesn’t mean that it isn't happening. Building Healthy Futures

FACT SHEET
• Partnerships support girls and women and keeps their voice on the agenda.
• Dissemination practices are key to ensuring girls and women’s safety.
• Safety policies and practices reflect the specific needs of the individual.

Informing Policy Action: Toward women’s and girls’ safety

Moving toward women’s and girls’ personal and community safety requires that programs and services and policy and decision-makers understand and reflect on the many ways in which our homes, schools, programs, places of work, and communities are unsafe. It also requires a willingness to understand that while many safety issues are a reflection of the dynamics of rural and socially-isolated communities, they are also tied to a lack of sufficient resources: when girls and women are forced to live in run-down housing their safety is in jeopardy.

In moving toward women’s and girls’ personal safety the questions become: How does the location of programs act as a barrier to women and girls seeking support? How do dissemination practices support women and girls living violence-free lives? How does the lack of resources prohibit leaving violent and abusive relationships? How do we assure girls and women that their safety and security are of upmost importance to our programs and services? The following questions can form part of a checklist for policy reflection:

- How does policy address the particular safety needs of women and girls at home, work, school, and communities:
  - guns?
  - distance?
  - farm and work related accidents?
  - women’s/girls’ well-being/mental health?
  - physical health related to poverty?
  - affordable housing?
  - safety plans?
- What policies are in place to address girls’ and women’s emotional safety?
- What policies are in place to address “cultural safety”?
- How does policy address privacy (noticeability) and confidentiality (anonymity)?
- How does policy provide for information dissemination?
Making a Difference in the Lives of Women and Girls

Gender inequality begins at birth and a woman negotiates different constructions of femininity over the course of her lifetime. The needs of young girls, adolescent girls, women, and elderly women are very different. Woman-centred programs respect the connection between mother and child, and respect the decisions that women and girls to make about their lives. However, women and girls need different types of intervention at different stages of their lives. There is a lack of services for girls and young women, especially for girls who are 16 to 18 years old. Most anti-violence initiatives that target this age group are not gender specific. Girls who are in violent families or in violent relationships have few places to turn for help. Studies have found that there is a strong link between youth homelessness and family violence and abuse. Girls and women need services and counselling designed according to their needs, as well as access to affordable housing, emergency housing for youth, access to education and training, and well-paying jobs. A key test of services for women and girls is whether they bring about positive change in their lives. Women and girls experiences of violence and abuse vary and whether or not a program or service is effective and desirable for women depends on the recognition of the multiple forms of oppression and response that is based on women’s knowledge.

Policies that address prevention and intervention across the life span consider the following:

- Plain language information is less likely to discriminate against age, language and literacy differences and differences between girls’s and women’s experiences.
- Intervention programs support women and girls empowerment and independence.
- Differences between girls and women reflect the need to tailor our programs and services to reflect the specificities of the various individuals, groups, and communities across the Atlantic region.
- Education is key to ending violence against girls and women.
- Girls and women need access to programs throughout their lives.
- Community support is particularly important in rural communities because of the lack of services and resources and the recognized need
to change this situation.
- Plain language information is less likely to discriminate against age, language and literacy differences and differences between girls’s and women’s experiences.
- Encourage girls and women to voice their own experiences.
- Intervention programs support women and girls empowerment and independence.
- Differences between girls and women reflect the need to tailor our programs and services to reflect the specificities of the various individuals, groups, and communities across the Atlantic region.

Informing Policy Action: Making a Difference in the Lives of Women and Girls

Effective intervention policies requires an understanding of the regional contexts and the differences between and among girls and women that give shape to their experiences of violence and abuse. It also requires that decision-makers simultaneously consider both the individual and social forces acting on her life that contradictorily erect barriers and provide supportive environments for change.

The questions become: How do programs and services get the word out? How do decision-makers know that programs and services are affective and applicable? The following questions can form part of a checklist for policy reflection:

- How does policy ensure that women and girls are aware of programs and services?
- How does policy determine that methods of creating awareness about programs and services are effective and applicable for rural, remote, and socially-isolated communities?
- How does policy determine program effectiveness? How does it incorporate feedback from program recipients? How is change effected?
- How does policy address local control and responsibility for program development, implementation, and evaluation?
- How does policy address the needs of rural women and girls?

Supporting Individual and Social Change

Making connections between personal experiences and social, political, and economic conditions that shape these experiences is critical to understanding
the work that must be done to transform the social conditions of abused women and girls’ lives. Changing attitudes about violence and abuse is one important component. When abused women begin to make the connection to their personal experiences and how the world constructs their position they begin to not only question the meanings that shape their lives, but also create a sense of themselves other than that of a victim.

The importance of questioning one’s own experiences, the social contexts which gave shape to them, using this knowledge to redefine one’s relation to the world, and discovering ways to work for change is crucial to ending the violence in girls and women’s lives. Supporting women and girls’ empowerment entails both education about violence against women, changing social attitudes about gender and the family, and providing options for women and girls that allow them to identify the personal changes that they need to make, as well as, the social changes that would need to occur to improve women’s lives and advance their economic and social security. Making this personal-political connection needs to also involve exploring the concepts of privilege and oppression that are based on a range of socially constructed inequalities: sexism, racism, homophobia and heterosexism, classism, and ableism.

Federal and provincial governments now officially acknowledge feminist analysis of violence against women that recognizes that violence and abuse is the result of unequal power and control. Many government-sponsored initiatives do not address the structural roots of unequal power relations. Nor do they effectively analyze how institutional structures sustain and perpetuate inequality. However, community-based programs can only be successful in doing this work if they have adequate resources. Therefore, it is imperative that our policies contain a component of social action in order to address the measures that are needed to facilitate the implementation of programs that promote change. These reasons include the following:

- Voicing one’s own experiences begins the process of change.
- Individual transformation happens through changes in the social condition of girls’ and women’s lives.
- Social change requires advocates.
- Ending violence against girls and women requires advocacy at both individual and social levels.
- Good prevention work creates social change.
- Social change happens collectively.
Sufficient resources are necessary to create and continue the work to end violence against girls and women.

Community support is particularly important in rural communities because of the lack of services and resources and the recognized need to change this situation.

Informing Policy Action: Supporting Individual and Social Change

How do programs and services support women and girls independence and, ultimately, equality? How do programs sustain themselves and transform overtime? Finally, what kinds of supports are necessary at the level of government to achieve these goals? The following questions can form part of a checklist for policy reflection:

- In what ways does policy support women and girls to recognize and deal with other, more social, issues that might help them deal with the abuse and violence in their lives?
  - education
  - housing
  - family law
  - health
  - welfare
  - police & criminal justice system
  - child custody
  - health
  - job training
  - resume writing
  - literacy training
  - transition houses/crisis counselling
  - higher and non-judgmental social assistance rates

- How does policy support the work of prevention?
- In what ways does policy address constraints that make it difficult for the programs to support women and girls?
- How does policy promote both individual and social change?
- How does policy address social action?
- How does policy address coalition building?
- How does policy proactively support local research for rural action?
- How does policy address sustainability?
- What policies are in place at the community/government levels to ensure that the goals of local programs and services are achieved?
- How does policy support institutional transformation?
ENDNOTES

1. If policy makers and program developers and evaluators are to be reflexive they must subject themselves to self scrutiny. At the same, reflexivity restrains our desire to make improvements and impose them based on our own perceptions. Reflexivity is a process of becoming aware of our own biases; the outcome is a kind of dialogue between policy and program developers and evaluators and the communities we serve, rather than a single interpretation. Reflexivity is way of collaborating in the work of transforming our practices, how we understand them and the situations in which we practice, the forces that shape and constrain them, and the ways in which our practices are expressed.

2. Critical feminist evaluation refers to the idea that evaluators cannot separate from the experiences, interests, knowledges, values and beliefs that shape how they develop and reflect on their practices. PRISM incorporated the values of reflexivity, contextuality, inclusivity, and responsiveness into our definition of evaluation. A critical feminist evaluation implies a process of questioning how our practices include or exclude the multiple voices of women and girls. It works to attend to the specific conditions and circumstances that are relevant to people’s lives. It implies that evaluators examine forces outside of the lenses to "evaluate" initiatives – questions such as sustainability that are not included but that, nonetheless, impact initiatives. A critical feminist evaluation that is responsive is proactive – it seeks to effect a conversation between as many voices as possible within and across various contexts – embracing difference.


8. Randall and Haskell, 2000


**Acknowledgements**

This fact sheet is based on the findings from a research project of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research called PRISM: Probing Rural Issues and Selecting Methods to Address Violence Against Women and Girls in Rural Communities in Atlantic Canada. It was written by Elizabeth Blaney and draws on quotes from service providers and program recipients of participating programs identified below. MMCFVVR acknowledges the financial contribution of the Women’s Program, Status of Women Canada in this project. **New Brunswick**: Le Centre de ressources et de crises familiales Beauséjour/Beauséjour Family Crisis Resource Centre; Kikahan Committee. **PEI**: PEI Rape /Sexual Assault Crisis Centre, Therapy Program; West Prince Transition and Support Service. **Nova Scotia**: AUBA Women’s Institute Black Women and Violence Project; Rural Youth Healthy Relationships Education Project. **Newfoundland/Labrador**: Corner Brook Status of Women, “Building Health Futures Program”; Planned Parenthood of Newfoundland and Labrador "Get SEHRious About Self-Esteem and Healthy Relationships"