

# Resisting Gender Violence



# RESISTING GENDER VIOLENCE

COLLECTED WORKS

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# RURAL GENDER VIOLENCE

Laura Pallarés Ameneiro and Xosé M. Santos

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## Abstract

In this chapter about violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people in rural spaces, we first consider how the definition of a rural area differs among governments, NGOs, and other entities; complicating understanding of the issue and development of initiatives to resist violence. We then examine the extent of the problem of violence against women and other gender minorities in rural spaces and look at some of the specific forms of violence enacted against them. Finally, we review some programs and initiatives to end violence against rural women and consider what strategies and resources might still be needed.

## Learning Outcomes

- Students will distinguish the vulnerabilities of rural women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people from those living in urban contexts, considering aspects such as the deficiency or remoteness of basic social services, the difficulties in accessing land ownership, and the lack of labor supply, among others
- Students will explain the importance of rural women in environmental conservation, food production, and rural development; and describe the negative impacts of violence against rural women on these activities
- Students will describe programs and other efforts to end gender violence against rural women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people

Many official reports, including those from the European Union, describe various forms of violence against women. However, the tendency to analyze them in a unidirectional way has often prevented us from distinguishing the different realities of women in various geographical territories and how they affect and aggravate gender violence. Rural women are vulnerable to intersectional discrimination, structural poverty, and social exclusion or precarious inclu-

sion. These factors are useful for understanding violence against women in its different forms. The territorial perspective is also valid and has been incorporated by international organizations (UN) to highlight the different expressions of violence against women in rural spaces in the Global North and South.

The first problem that arises when talking about violence against women in rural areas is to define the concept of “rural areas.” At a general level, it does not seem excessively complicated: areas characterized by low population density and an economy based mainly on agriculture and livestock. It is not at all easy, however, to set density thresholds for defining what is rural. These vary greatly from one country to another, ranging from a few hundred inhabitants to several thousand. In fact, it is common to classify rural areas simply as those that are “not urban,” which is evidence of their marginalization (since they are defined by exclusion).

International organizations such as the the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, and the European Union have tried to define what is rural or urban, but it is difficult to reach a consensus due to the different socio-territorial realities (and thus, different definitions) of each country. The need to classify what is “rural” and what is “urban” led the OECD to establish three categories: predominantly urban, intermediate, and predominantly rural. The European Union created a new system based on a population density of 300 inhabitants per square kilometer. In the United States, the Center on Rural Innovation (CORI), points out that there are more than a dozen definitions of rural, although they opt for two of them; that of the Census and that of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) (Center on Rural Innovation, 2022).

Sociology uses a qualitative rather than numerical perspective to define the rural space as the opposite of the urban one, defining it with characteristics such as a quieter life, more connection to nature, and where family and neighborhood relationships are much stronger: In short, a kind of refuge from modern city life. Urban dwellers may imagine a “Rural Idyll” (a kind of hypothetical utopian life) which has a long history in the West, although it re-emerges with greater force in times of crisis in urban society (Short, 2006). Bell (2006) points out that this rural idyll is a product of the bourgeois imagination that develops as a result of the processes of urbanization, industrialization, and modernization.

This idealized vision of the rural world, in harmony with nature, is a projection opposite to the city. This rural idyll transmits ethical and aesthetic values that connect with a disappearing world where our cultural roots reside. Gallent and Andersson (2007), in the case of England, point out that the perception of the landscape romanticizes the rural world to the point that the rural lifestyle becomes a characteristic of *Englishness*.

Therefore, defining what is rural or urban is not an easy task. We must even reject thinking about the two concepts as opposites, since there are vast transitional spaces in which rural and urban interact in a dynamic process of constant change and adaptation. Also, the social and territorial diversity that exists makes it difficult to compare the realities of many countries, such as India, Burkina Faso, or the United States. Nor should we forget that rural areas are often analyzed and interpreted from an urban rather than an integral perspective.

Even with these conceptual difficulties, we have no doubt that we live in an urban society. In quantitative terms, the United Nations reported that in 2007 the population living in cities exceeded the rural population for the first time in history, and since then the imbalance has become more pronounced. Although COVID-19 slowed down the urban-

ization process, the 56% of the population living in urbanized environments today will reach 68% by 2050, according to UN estimates (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2018).

But beyond purely quantitative data, what is certain is that, in general, cities set the social, cultural, and economic pace of the world. They are where political and economic power is concentrated, and from them come the social and cultural trends that define the contemporary world. In fact, the marginalization of the rural world is defined by a growing abandonment of these spaces, by the lack of public and private services, by the growing substitution of family agricultural production by large agricultural enterprises, or by an increasingly intensive use of rural-natural spaces to satisfy the needs of the urban population, from mining to tourist demand. This marginalization, which often makes institutions weak or absent, is relatively common in many rural areas, causing, for example, gender violence to be much more intense, although also more invisible.

Despite the decline of the rural population and the industrialization of agriculture, the rural world and small farmers are still responsible for a very important part of human and animal nutrition, as well as for the preservation of more sustainable production systems. In this context, the role of women is fundamental, as various reports have been highlighting for several decades now. The International Day of Rural Women has been celebrated, at the request of the UN, every October 15 since 2008 to recognize the decisive role of women in promoting agricultural and rural development, improving food security, and eradicating rural poverty.



ELMLEY CASTLE, WORCESTER.

Western conceptions of rural life may project it as idyllic, romantic, and easy

## What is “Rural Development”?

Although the reality of rural development can be traced back to much of the 20th century, it was in the early 1970s that the World Bank formally introduced the concept to refer to “a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people—the rural poor.” At present, rural development policies are assumed by the major institutions responsible for global governance and by most countries. For the EU, it is one of the basic pillars of its agricultural policy. For the UN, it is essential to achieve the objectives of Sustainable Development, and means not only growth but also the incorporation of ideas linked to quality of life. However, it is a concept in continuous evolution and, in fact, the UN recently published a text in which it reflects on the need to reconsider rural development (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021).

Estimates by international organizations indicate that women are responsible for about half of world food production: even more so in developing countries, where this percentage is between 60 and 80%. Therefore, rural women

play a fundamental role not only in agriculture and food, but also in the conservation of agricultural systems and rural development. All this is in spite of the marginalized situations in which they live, the high levels of poverty, and the violence that further aggravates their living conditions.

## Marginalization, Poverty, and Violence Against Rural Women

As has been made clear throughout the different chapters of this book, violence is a broad concept that is not limited to physical or psychological violence, but also includes other types of violence that are often more subtle and difficult to identify; but which also contribute to marginalization, impoverishment and, frequently, contempt for women's work. There are many reports produced by international or national organizations, both public and private, that ratify these ideas.

Rurality acts as an aggravating factor that significantly worsens the situation of women. This is because the global phenomenon of women's marginalization is compounded by specific circumstances that worsen inequalities and, consequently, the secondary and undervalued role of women in relation to men. At a general level, the World Health Organization (WHO) states that across their lifetime, one in three women, around 736 million, are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner—a number that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade. These data are even more serious in the most impoverished countries; mainly in Africa, Andean America, and some regions of Asia, always coinciding with countries where the rural world has more weight (WHO, 2021).

But this is a problem that affects all countries, regardless of their level of development. For example, in Spain, official data from the Ministry of Equality, as well as from other organizations working in the field of violence against women, show that, in relative terms, rural women suffer much higher rates of violence than urban women and; in addition, take much longer to report situations of violence, an average of 20 years compared to less than nine years for urban women. In fact, the Attorney General's Office in Spain warns of the greater vulnerability of rural women to gender violence, and highlights the greater difficulty women have in accessing prevention and support services. Moreover, many rural municipalities cannot join the VioGén system, which monitors cases of gender violence, because they cannot meet certain requirements due to insufficient resources. Official statistics and reports on violence in Spain highlight not only the higher incidence of violence against rural women, but also the social, economic, and institutional conditions that increase the risk of suffering such violence. We are referring to the wage gap, job segregation, the great weight of role differences and the permanence of gender stereotypes, the difficulties in accessing farm management, and the weakness of public social services.

## Learning Activity: IPV Resources in Rural Areas

*Objective:* Students will examine how rural locales often lack the social services resources required to support survivors of interpersonal and sexual violence adequately. This will encourage students to make connections between access to social services and the prevalence of IPV rates in rural locations.

1. Identify two rural locations in your home community (US or internationally) and examine what prevention organizations and social services exist for interpersonal or sexual violence survivors.
2. Use Google Maps to search what public transit options are available to each resource, and make sure to note the roundtrip distance from the town/city center to the available resource for public transit, walking, and driving distance. If there are no available resources in this town or city, use the “search this area” function to find the closest resource location. If nothing appears, zoom out and see if the next largest town or city has resources available. Make sure to note if the original location you chose does not have available resources for survivors.
3. Use <https://www.city-data.com/> to search the crime rates in the location you chose. You can filter these by the type of crime, so make sure to take note of any IPV or sexual violence crime.
4. Share your results with a classmate and compare notes about your chosen location. What inferences can you make about the crime rates vs. the available services in this location? How might a person experiencing IPV or sexual violence in this area go about accessing services? What barriers will exist for this person?

This situation of vulnerability, marginalization, and violence is reproduced with greater or lesser intensity in all countries; and progress, when it does occur, is usually too slow and not visible to the majority of the population. One example is that of the remote rural areas of northern Canada, where the situation of many women is critical, with rates of violence that far exceed the average for a country that is considered to be one of the most developed in the world. A report prepared in that country recognizes some elements that serve to explain this dramatic situation, including the permanence of traditional values and strong community ties, as well as physical and social isolation (Nonomura & Baker, 2021).

If we travel to the Global South, situations of violence against women in rural areas continue to be very intense. Numerous studies and official reports insist on their seriousness and prevalence despite the invisibility they face. In a study carried out some years ago in India, Sethuraman et al. (2006) highlighted the reality of violence against women and the consequences for their health and that of their children. One of the most striking aspects of their research

is their assertion that “in the rural communities, domestic violence was perceived as a normal daily occurrence that women felt they had to accept, and they felt that no one would become involved to stop the violence” (p. 134).

The situation becomes even worse if we consider the quality of the statistics. Palermo et al. (2014) title their article “Tip of the Iceberg: Reporting and Gender violence in Developing Countries.” After analyzing almost 300,000 data on women collected in 24 countries, they conclude that there is a very low level of reporting, on average seven percent, due to multiple factors such as embarrassment, the belief that reporting is not going to do any good, or that violence is part of normal life. Another of the results of this research indicates that it is in rural areas where there are a lower number of complaints compared to urban areas.

As we have just seen, the different studies carried out on gender violence in the rural world point to a series of factors that are very important for understanding the prevalence of violence in rural areas. One of these factors is geographical isolation, which is often accompanied by a lack of social services to support women not only in terms of care and support, but also in terms of prevention. A second factor is of a social and cultural nature. It is related to more traditional societies in which patriarchy is still very strong and where social control prevents many women from taking the step forward to overcome this situation of violence, which even they normalize.

A third factor is of an economic nature due to the greater dependence on men. In the Global North, the process of masculinization in rural areas is related to the lack of employment opportunities for women. The fact that they do not have their own income increases their vulnerability. According to a study by FAO, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, women in rural areas are 14 to 34% less likely to own their own land than men; they are also more likely to have low paid, informal work, and 24% less income than their male counterparts. Their legal role is often reduced to farm support; which, among other things, prevents them from making decisions or accessing credit (2018). The protests in the agricultural sector that took place in Europe at the beginning of 2024 showed us images of demonstrations in which women were practically absent, with the tractor being the symbolic (and masculine) tool that best visualizes this overrepresentation of men in rural areas.

In a reflective document published by the Center for Development Research of the University of Bonn (Germany), it is pointed out that rural development is not possible as long as gender violence continues to be an endemic problem in the world (Beuchelt et al., 2022). In relation to the Global South, the document points out that gender violence in all its forms limits women’s capacity to make decisions, and reduces their access to projects and services that contribute to development; helping to perpetuate poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition. However, the text indicates that there are multiple approaches and strategies that have proven effective in the fight against gender violence; in particular, the most effective is to build strong feminist movements that give voice and visibility to rural women.

## Strategic Documents and Rural Women

Many countries in the world have strategies to combat violence against women and girls or, more generally, documents that guide gender equality.

The importance of these texts lies in their *enforcement*, since they are often no more than declarations of intent that are not translated into policy implementation. Examples are countries such as the United States, Ireland, Japan, and Iraq. International organizations such as the UN, FAO, ECLAC, OECD, and the World Bank also have strategies that often set the stage for initiatives that will later be developed by many countries or support their policies.

Often, the fight against gender violence, much less against rural women, is not part of the priorities of many governments, so it is these international organizations that take on the challenge of raising awareness and designing specific measures for each country. Unfortunately, many of these documents barely consider the unique needs of rural women, although, when they do, it is always to acknowledge their greater vulnerability. One of the agencies working in the field of gender equality is USAID, which in June 2023 launched a brief entitled “Women’s Land & Property Rights and Economic Security,” in which it warned of the difficulties many women face in accessing land ownership and the consequences this has on gender violence, among other things.

Read some of the strategic documents on gender equality that some countries have approved and analyze, from a critical perspective, the importance they give to rural women. As examples, you can consult:

- UNFPA Iraq. (n.d.). *The national strategy to combat violence against women and girls 2018-2030*. [https://iraq.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/the\\_national\\_strategy\\_to\\_combat\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_and\\_girls\\_2018-2030.pdf](https://iraq.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/the_national_strategy_to_combat_violence_against_women_and_girls_2018-2030.pdf)
- Union Europea. (n.d.). *Plan de implementación Colombia: Compromiso europeo por el cierre de brechas de género y el empoderamiento de las mujeres y las niñas*. <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/Plan%20de%20Acción%20de%20Género.pdf>
- The White House. (n.d.). *National strategy on gender equity and equality*. <https://bidenwhite-house.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/National-Strategy-on-Gender-Equity-and-Equality.pdf> (Archived content)

## Violence Against LGBTQIA+ People in Rural Areas

If violence against women in rural spaces is still a very evident reality, violence perpetrated against LGBTQIA+ people is much more invisible. Although there are quite a few academic studies, there is very little official information. In general, it is understood that geographic isolation, a more traditional value system, and the lack of resources and support for the LGBTQIA+ community, make situations of violence worse than those found in urban areas, favoring a selective migration to the cities. However, although this is true, it is also true that the rural world is much more diverse than we might think.

The Movement Advancement Project (MAP) conducted a 2019 report on LGBT people in rural America, where they estimate that between 2.9 and 3.8 million LGBTQIA+ people are living. That report noted many of the issues these people face, especially if they are people of color, immigrants, or have a disability. The concepts of family, faith, and community that are at the core of rural life in America lead to situations of discrimination and violence. However, the report also points out the diversity of the rural world; and although it confirms the greater vulnerability of this group of people, including the public policies applied, it also states that this is not always the case and that there are communities that embrace LGBT people and their families and that “the complexity of public opinion in rural America illustrates that rural communities must not be written off as opposing equality for LGBT people” (executive summary, p. 8).

Several studies have tried to overcome this monolithic vision of the rural world as a hetero-patriarchal space. It is true that there is discrimination and violence, but diversity is also embraced and the LGBTQIA+ community has been able to find strategies to develop a full life in the countryside. These strategies are not limited only to creating their own communities, or using the tactic of equality—in which they highlight their role as farmers and minimize their queer identity. On the contrary, in some cases they reaffirm their queerness with great dignity, as Raj (2024) explains in his research on southern Portugal.

The issue of the migration of LGBTQIA+ people from rural areas to cities is defined in binary terms and is increasingly questioned; neither is the city a gay paradise, nor is the countryside a vacuum in which it is not possible to construct a non-hetero-normative gender identity. However, violence against LGBTQIA+ people is greater in rural areas. The Trevor Project’s *Research Brief* (2021) reveals that the situation of LGBTQ youth in rural areas is worse than in urban areas. In fact, of the young people interviewed in rural areas, 69% stated that their community was somewhat or very unaccepting of LGBTQ people, compared to 19% in large cities.

In its 2021 report, the National School Climate Survey, conducted in the United States by GLSEN, showed that 81.8% of the students surveyed felt unsafe at school, with the most hostile environment being in rural areas where, in addition, they have fewer resources to deal with this daily violence (Kosciw et al., 2022). Despite this serious situation, studies such as that of Wike et al. (2021) not only confirm the negative effects of cultural norms and lack of privacy in the rural world, but also point out that “youth are resourceful in finding and providing support for one another in their communities” (p. NP19009).

In the case of the European Union, there is no specific data on the rural world, but in its 2024 report, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights states that the percentage of those who felt discriminated against in some

area of their life in the last 12 months was 36% (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2024). This represents a decrease from the 2019 report. However, the International Lesbian and Gay Association-Europe (ILGA), an umbrella advocacy group, notes a worrying increase in violence against LGBTQ+ people in Europe and Central Asia (2023).

Unfortunately, data on violence against LGBTQIA+ people living in rural areas in many parts of the world are almost non-existent. However, it is not difficult to assert that it must not be easy, given the general situation of LGBTQIA+ people in many countries around the world. A report by the Arcus Foundation (2019), on five African countries, some of them with very advanced legislation on LGBTQIA+ rights, emphasizes the lack of official data; although the data collected in their study show the seriousness of the problem in general, and the very scarce information on rural areas where neither NGOs nor social services reach.

## Still a Long Way to Go

If inequality gaps between women and men have historically been generated and sustained, in rural areas this process has had deeper impacts that hinder the full development of women. Violence, discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion are dynamics that occur on a daily basis in rural and agrarian contexts; leaving women without access to their empowerment in social, political, economic, and cultural terms.

Discriminatory practices based on the use of stereotypes have the effect of undermining, restricting, or nullifying the ability of people, in this case rural women, to fully exercise and enjoy their rights. These ways of thinking and acting deny the principle of equality between people and make it possible to exercise different forms of violence (from harassment and physical abuse to symbolic and discursive violence) against women.

An example of these discriminatory practices is a recent study by the Spanish Federation of Rural Women's Associations (FADEMUR), which *characterizes the violence suffered in rural areas as invisible and socially normalized* (Delegación del Gobierno contra la Violencia de Género, 2020). The violence experienced by women in different areas has a structural background of exclusion, discrimination, and lack of access to better living conditions in general; hence, the importance of identifying, contextually and differentially, the structural relations of inequality that generate it, as well as the cultural and symbolic constructions that reinforce and express it.

An in-depth understanding of the ways in which violence against women is produced and reproduced in the rural world and its different typologies makes it possible to talk about institutional and economic violence. Numerous examples could be cited to make situations easily classified as violence visible. Increasingly, it has been stressed that the State can also be an agent that commits forms of institutionalized gender violence; not only because its agents carry out acts of physical, psychological, or sexual violence; but also because the State and its agents may fail in their responsibility to prevent, punish, and eradicate such violence against women. Institutional violence contains a moral dimension, as it objectifies and disregards individual people, presenting mainly a symbolic or administrative focus (Pereyra, 2015).

Thus, institutional violence includes not only those manifestations of violence against women in which the State is directly responsible for its action or omission, but also those acts that show a pattern of discrimination or an obstacle to the exercise and enjoyment of rights (Bodelón, 2014). Some authors speak of institutional violence as a synonym for structural violence, by exposing the violence exercised by institutions when they fail to fulfill their obligations to enforce citizens' rights. Johan Galtung (1969) prefers the term "structural violence" because it is more abstract, and violence is not always exercised by a particular institution; although he admits that the term "institutional violence" may be appropriate in certain contexts.

An example of institutional violence is the study on structural and institutional violence against rural Mixtec women, the case of the PROSPERA Social Inclusion Program in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, which articulates and coordinates the institutional offer of social policy programs and actions aimed at the population living in poverty (Torres Beltrán & Tena Guerrero, 2019). From the reading of this study, it can be observed based on the narratives of women's experiences, that the State, through PROSPERA, exercises structural violence ranging from the discourse of poverty to direct violence, perceived as "mistreatment," and exercised by those who carry out the program, which puts them in a situation of dependence and reproduces the role that has kept them in disadvantage, vulnerability, and inequality.

The case of Brazilian Mariana Ferrer, accusing businessman André de Camargo Aranha of sexual assault and rape, is another clear example of gender and institutional violence: the lack of ethics of those involved is evident, as they stopped judging the aggressor to judge the victim and her conduct (Accioly & Terra e Luanda Pires, 2020). This is an example of institutional violence practiced by public institutions that, through their agents, devalue women's rights. The judiciary should be an environment where victims are welcomed and listened to, not humiliated and discouraged from reporting.

Another typology of violence against rural women is economic violence, defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality as "any act or behavior which causes economic damage to a person (2017)." Economic violence against *women* emerges from the system of power relations between genders, and consists of harm or aggression to the economic survival of women (Ruano Duany, 2022). Economic violence manifests differently in certain contexts (cultural, social, and institutional), one of the clearest examples being limitations by institutions on women's access to employment or property rights (Arango, 2015).

A study conducted by FAO (2018) confirms that only 15% of landowners in the world are women. Despite the fact that nearly one in two farmers are women, women are much less likely than men to be the legal owners of the land they farm. Although technically 164 countries recognize women's right to own, use, and make decisions regarding land; in fact, social norms mean that these rights are accessible in [just 52 of these countries](#). Through numerous indicators, FAO (2018) concludes that women landowners are less likely than men to obtain a legal document proving ownership of their plots, or to have their names on the land ownership document.

## Gender Violence, Rural Women, and Land Ownership

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) was founded in 1948 to assess the state of the natural world and promote the necessary measures to safeguard it.

Aware of the importance of gender inequality and violence against women for sustainable development and climate change, the IUCN has also become involved in the struggle for equality, contributing numerous publications that demonstrate the causal relationships between gender violence, development issues, and climate change. Other environmental organizations, such as Greenpeace, have also become involved in this issue, as they understand its relevance for the achievement of their objectives.



Despite many countries' laws allowing women to own land, worldwide, women's land ownership is low

In one of its reports, IUCN addresses the issue of access to land ownership and links it to food security, poverty, and vulnerability; ownership being one of the fundamental aspects to consider in relation to violence against women in rural areas (Castañeda Camey et al., 2020). In many countries, women's right to land ownership does not exist or is very restricted, which is further evidence of economic and institutional violence. The World Bank points out that in MENA countries (the Middle East and North Africa), less than 50% have equal legislation regarding women's and men's access to land ownership, and only in Europe and Central Asia does it reach 100%; nevertheless, customary norms limiting women's access are often applied (Almodóvar-Reteguis, 2019). The Stand for Her Land campaign (Her Rights, Her Land, A Better Future for All) wants to put an end to this situation of violence.

To be even more aware of the difficulty of access to land ownership, you may want to study the case of several countries where land ownership is a reality for many women, not only in terms of legal aspects but also in terms of tradition. On the Land Portal (Land Portal, n.d.) website you can obtain a lot of information to analyze the situation of rural women in some countries in relation to access to land ownership.

Numerous examples worldwide clearly identify economic violence as one of the typologies experienced by rural women, primarily in access to land ownership. One such example is the recent study, “Breaking Patriarchal Succession Cycles: How Land Relations Influence Women’s Roles in Farming” (Sutherland et al., 2023) in Scotland. The analysis shows that women who grew up on farms and inherited were more likely to identify as farmers and engage in machine work, while women who gained access to farmland through marriage tended to engage more in housework and identify as farmers’ wives.

“Intergenerational Farm Succession: How Does Gender Fit?” (Sheridan et al., 2021), focuses on economic violence, especially in the Australian context, relating gender and farm inheritance patterns internationally, and identifying how gender norms continue to privilege sons and discourage daughters, and where farm inheritance is often based on an unfair distribution of assets between siblings.

Several recent studies and research confirm that, despite legal changes, women continue to encounter obstacles to inheriting farmland, as confirmed by an article referring to the fact that in the United States women still do not inherit farmland as often as their male relatives (Melotte, 2022). It confirms that girls and women are less likely than their brothers to take over farms.

## We Must Continue to Move Forward

Regardless of the cases of gender violence against women in rural areas, in recent years there have been significant positive advances towards the prevention and cessation of violence through *socialization and education based on equality*, as well as the empowerment of rural women. Preventing violence and ensuring empowerment is not only critical to the well-being of individuals, families, and rural communities, but also to overall economic productivity, given the large presence of women in the global agricultural labor force.



Patriarchal customs mean many women farmers will not profit from their own labors

One positive example is UN Women supporting rural women’s leadership and participation in shaping laws, strategies, policies, and programs on all issues that affect their lives, including improved food and nutrition security and rural livelihoods. Training equips these women with skills that enable them to access new livelihoods and adapt technology to their needs. UN Women works to end poverty through programs that provide training, loans, and practical skills to empower rural women, give them a voice, strengthen social services and raise awareness of women’s rights. UN Women also works to ensure women’s access to basic services, control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology, and financial services.

Another example of positive progress is “A Comprehensive Approach to End Violence Against Women in Rural India” (UN Women, 2022). Jugnu Clubs, formed with UN Women’s support in several tea estates in Assam, are women’s empowerment groups that are helping to break the silence on violence against women and mobilize action for prevention, safety, and equality for all women and girls. As of January 2017, the clubs were formed as part of a comprehensive approach to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women and girls in the region, such as violence at home, at work, and in public spaces. With support from UN Women, women and men from rural communities in the Indian state of Assam have found new ways to work together to prevent and respond to violence against women, youth, and children in their neighborhoods.

Another example of the struggle for equality, prevention, and non-violence against women in rural areas, intensified by COVID-19, is the campaign to empower rural women in the face of the pandemic. “Rural women, women with rights” in Latin America, led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, was organized because many of them face serious limitations in accessing productive resources, such as land, water, agricultural inputs, financing, insurance, or training; as well as barriers to placing their products in the markets. “Rural women, women with rights” seeks to increase the visibility of these women, disseminate information and proposals for solutions to the situation of rural women, eliminate gender violence, and promote solutions for food and nutritional security (2018).

In parallel, research by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) investing in rural people recognizes that gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental to rural transformation, but that without addressing violence against women these development goals are not achievable (2019). Being free from any form of gender violence is a fundamental human right and an important requirement for food and nutrition security. In fact, violence reduces the well-being of rural women and can impair their ability to work, care for their families, and contribute to society. Violence affects all groups of women, but rural and Indigenous women are especially vulnerable. Many aspects of rural women's lives expose them to risks, such as fetching water and firewood from faraway places, or walking to and from markets after dark.

The fight comes through empowering rural women for gender equality. Empowering rural women economically can help reduce their vulnerability to abuse and strengthen their independence. Many IFAD-funded programs support women's livelihoods in small-scale agriculture, fisheries, livestock, and rural entrepreneurship. By enabling greater access to land, credit, and other productive resources, these initiatives accelerate the economic and social empowerment of rural women.

Another positive example of the fight against gender violence in the rural world is the consolidation of projects benefiting 95 rural women victims of gender violence in Argentina, aimed at strengthening productive units and supporting rural women victims of gender violence (Redacción Agrolink, 2021).

At the same time, progress has been made in terms of equality and empowerment of women in rural areas in other parts of the world, such as Peru. The Ministry of Agrarian Development and Irrigation (MIDRAGI), through its executing unit Agro Rural, is responsible for co-financing projects for rural enterprises run by women farmers in the highlands and jungle areas of Peru (Agro Rural, 2021). These projects promote the empowerment and productive development of women in rural areas to reduce poverty and increase the competitiveness and resilience of rural families through sustainable economic activities, with emphasis on family farming.

## Summary

We have seen that violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people living in rural areas occurs in every country. Stereotypes about rural living and existing inequalities such as prevalence of rigid or traditional gender roles/normative heterosexuality combine with factors unique to rural areas—such as isolation, lack of access to social services, unequal access to land ownership and other forms of economic security, as well as a general acceptance of gender violence as “normal”—contribute to increased prevalence, and decreased visibility, of gender violence in rural areas. LGBTQIA+ people may face even greater risk and less visibility of violence, although this experience may be different in some places. Governments and NGOs around the world may be both perpetrators of institutional and personal violence against women *and* agents of support and change.

Numerous positive advances have been made worldwide in terms of equality and non-violence by different institutions/organizations that act for the empowerment of women. The struggle for their recognition has been going on for many years, taking into consideration that women’s human rights are an inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of universal human rights. Through these advances, the importance of the full and integral participation of rural women as agents and beneficiaries in the development process is perceived, and especially the importance of eliminating violence against rural women in public and private life.

## Review Questions

The "Rural Idyll" misrepresents the realities of rural life by (select all that apply):

- Spreading a romantic view of how women live in rural areas
- Projecting a belief that "rural" and "urban" are opposites
- Describing the countryside as unclean
- Allowing urban dwellers to ignore the effects of urbanization and industrialization on people in rural areas



Violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people in rural areas is exacerbated (worsened) by the following (select all that apply):

- Lack of access to social services
- Prevalence of rigid gender stereotypes
- Acceptance of gender violence as "normal"
- Economic dependence on men due to lack of independent income, ownership of land, and formal paid work



Strategic documents that aim to guide gender equality policies but may not have mechanisms to implement the policies include (select all that apply):

- The National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls 2018-2030 (Iraq)
- Plan de Implementación Colombia (Colombia)
- National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality (USA)



Which of the following about violence against LGBTQIA+ people in rural areas is/are true?

- Violence against LGBTQ+ people is even less visible than violence against straight, cis women
- Violence against LGBTQ+ people increases if they also are persons of color, are immigrants, or have a disability
- Some rural communities welcome LGBTQ+ people and their families
- Violence against LGBTQ+ youth is more prevalent than violence against these youth in urban areas



Strategies to reduce violence against women in rural areas include (select all that apply)?

- Providing loans and training to increase women's economic independence
- Women's empowerment groups that speak against violence and take actions for safety and prevention
- Projects for women that promote sustainable agricultural activities



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.education/resistinggenderviolence/?p=273#h5p-6>

Answer key: 1. a., b., and d., 2. all of the above, 3. all of the above, 4. all of the above, 5. all of the above,

## Questions for Reflection

1. Reflect and debate on the mental idea that you have of the rural space, taking into account both the reality of your immediate surroundings and that of other countries. In these reflections think about the role of women: How do you imagine their work? What is the image of rural women conveyed by the media and, especially, by artistic creations, from painting to cinema? Look closely at some works by French artist Jean-François Millet, such as “The Gleaners” or “Harvesters Resting,” and analyze the female figures and compare with current photographs in countries of the Global South.
2. The subordinate role of women in the rural world has been reinforced in recent decades as a consequence of the technification of agriculture. Large machines and the use of highly innovative technology have reinforced the masculinization of the countryside, the emigration of women, and their subsidiary role on farms. Look for images of farmers’ demonstrations that have taken place, especially in Europe in early 2024, and reflect on the prominence of the tractor as a symbol of rural power and the presence (or absence) of women in these protests.
3. Despite the commitments made by various governments, many women and girls around the world are still unable to access quality, multi-sectoral services that are essential for their safety, protection, and recovery; especially for those who already suffer multiple forms of discrimination, and more specifically for women in rural settings, with much more pronounced forms of violence, discrimination, and exclusion. Therefore, it is important that each government put into action prevention and non-violence techniques. Seek information on the lack of prevention techniques for women victims of gender violence in the world, and more specifically for women living in rural areas.
4. Different institutions/organizations are currently working to show initiatives and resistance to violence in rural areas. An example is the Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW) project (n.d.), an organization that was created to respond to the silence of Kenyan society in addressing violence against women and girls. Analyze and reflect on the different initiatives undertaken by national and international organizations in different areas of the world, looking for the similarities and differences between them.
5. How might factors such as isolation, limited access to social services, job insecurity, and poverty increase the likelihood of experiencing gender violence?
6. How do traditional gender roles and expectations in rural areas influence the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV)? In what ways might these roles either perpetuate or challenge the cycle of violence, and what strategies could empower people to change these dynamics?

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## Further Learning

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