



Invisible No More: Addressing Intimate Partner Violence Among Rural Women

A comprehensive framework for coordinated, culturally responsive interventions in rural communities

About This Presentation

This session draws on evidence-based research and frontline experiences to address the unique challenges faced by survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) in rural contexts.

We'll examine the intersection of geographic isolation, cultural factors, and systemic barriers that contribute to the invisibility of rural IPV, while exploring promising practices for intervention.

Meet Our Speaker: Dr. Shani Collins Woods

Academic Background

- Ph.D. in Social Work, University of Alabama
- Master of Social Work, University of Alabama
- Master of Arts in Africana Women's Studies,
Clark Atlanta University
- Bachelor of Arts in English, Tougaloo College

Professional Highlights

- BSW Program Director & Associate Professor
- Founder of Collins Consulting Company, LLC (2014)
- PCORI Researcher on Stroke Patient Outcomes
- Author of *SHE Devotional* (2015)
- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated
- Council on Social Work Education
 - Member and Site Visitor

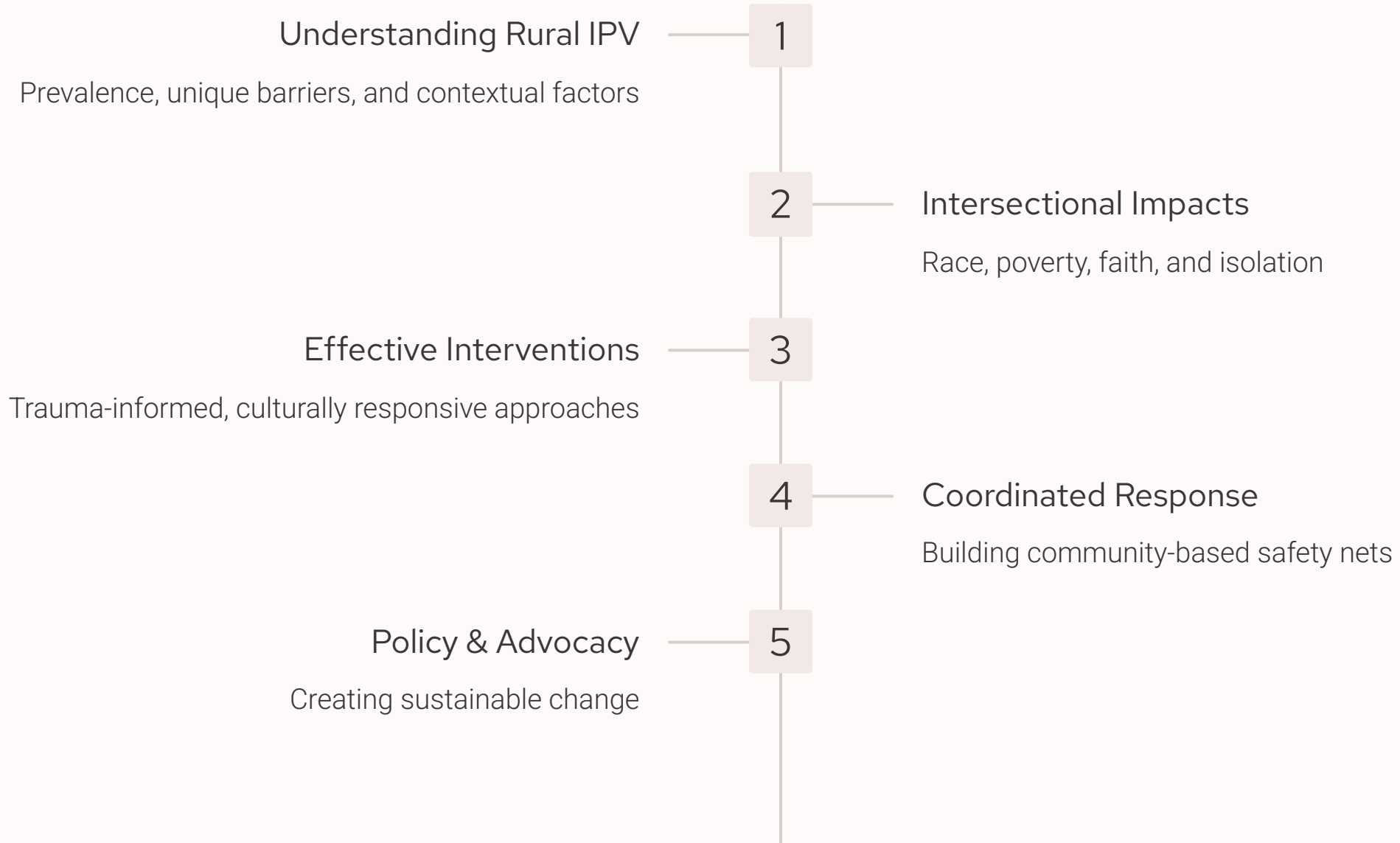


"Dedicated to advancing health equity, educating future social workers, and fostering sustainable community change."

Learning Outcomes

- 1 Identify key barriers that prevent rural women from safely disclosing and escaping IPV
- 2 Analyze how race, poverty, faith, and isolation intersect to impact rural survivors
- 3 Evaluate trauma-informed and community-based approaches to IPV intervention
- 4 Apply research findings to improve coordinated community response efforts
- 5 Develop strategies to support policy change and resource access for rural survivors

Agenda



Part I: Understanding Rural Intimate Partner Violence

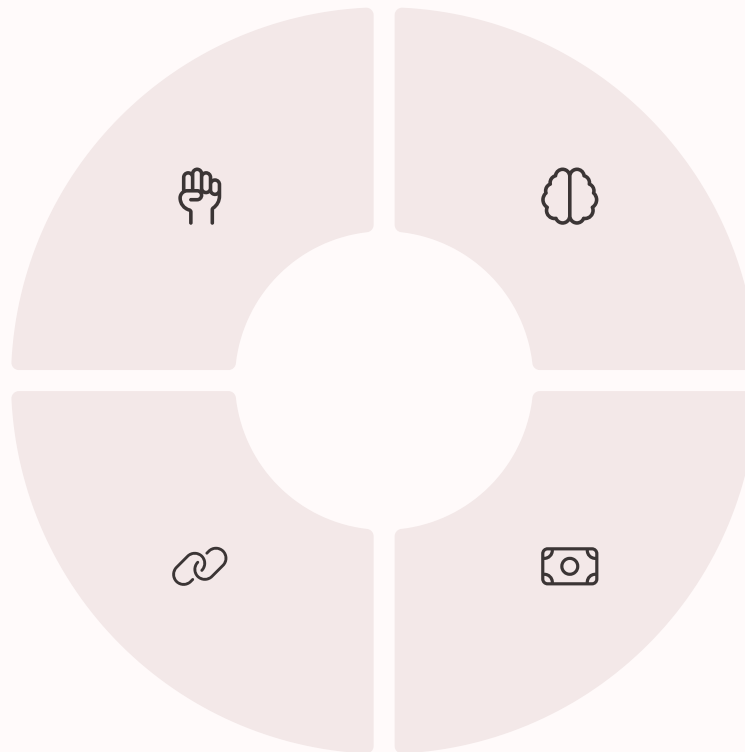


Defining Intimate Partner Violence

"A pattern of behavior used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship."

Physical
Hitting, pushing, choking, using
weapons

Sexual
Coercion, assault, reproductive
control



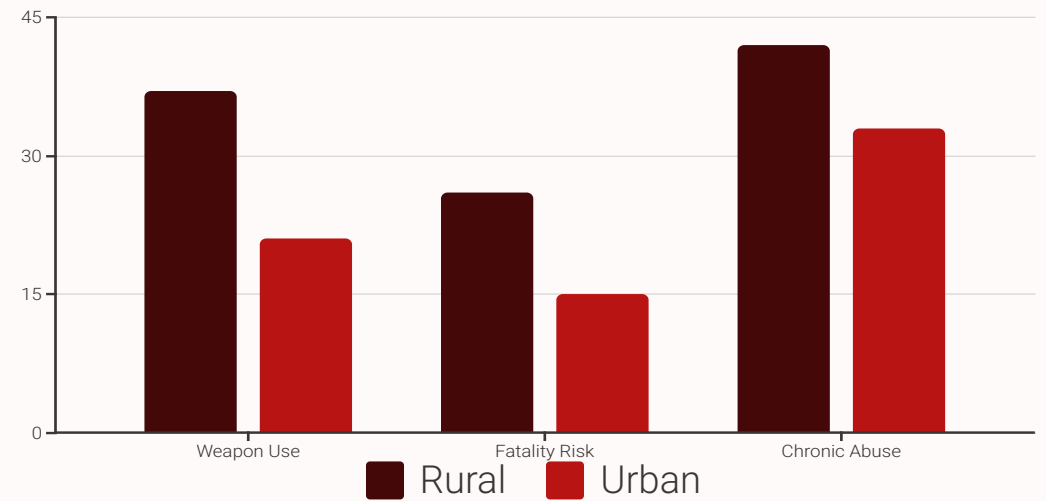
Psychological
Threats, intimidation, isolation,
gaslighting

Economic
Controlling finances, sabotaging
employment

Prevalence of Rural IPV

Research suggests that IPV in rural areas occurs at rates similar to or higher than in urban areas, but with:

- Greater severity of physical abuse
- Higher rates of weapon involvement
- More chronic patterns of abuse
- Higher fatality rates



Source: National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), CDC



The Rural Context: Geographical Realities

44.1M

Rural Population

Americans living in rural communities
(USDA, 2020)

42%

Service Distance

Of rural counties lack domestic violence
services within county borders

75 min

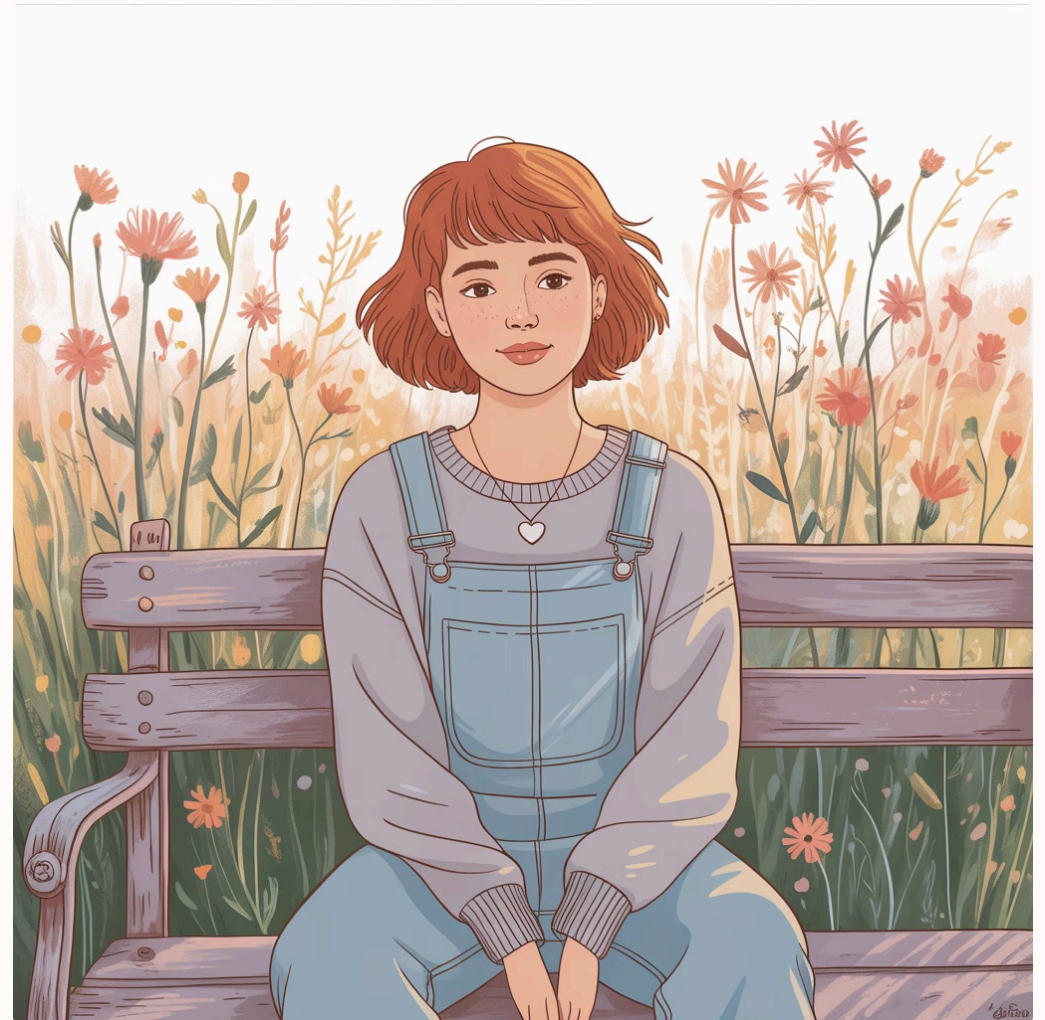
Average Travel

Average time to reach the nearest IPV
service provider in rural areas

Unique Barriers: Geographic Isolation

Geographic isolation creates practical challenges for rural IPV survivors that urban survivors may not face:

- Limited transportation options with vast distances to services
- Unreliable or nonexistent cell phone and internet coverage
- Weather-dependent road access in many regions
- Difficulty accessing emergency services with extended response times



Unique Barriers: Social Context



Lack of Privacy

"Everyone knows everyone" creates difficulties in seeking help confidentially. Survivors report being seen entering a service provider's office or having their vehicle recognized at a shelter.



Fear of Gossip

Information travels quickly in small communities. Survivors fear public exposure and judgment when seeking help, potentially impacting their children, employment, and social standing.



Interconnected Relationships

Abusers may have connections to local law enforcement, judges, or service providers. These relationships can undermine confidence in the justice system and help-seeking.

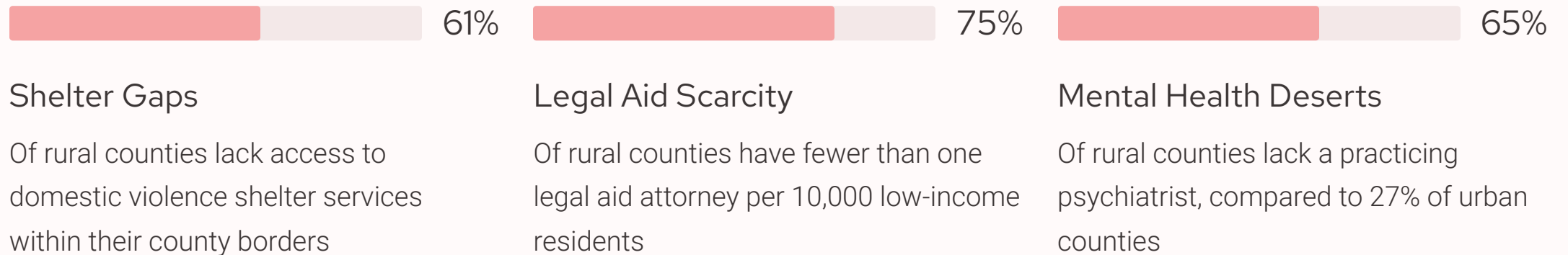
Unique Barriers: Rural Cultural Values



Values that may complicate help-seeking:

- Self-reliance and independence
- Family privacy ("What happens in this house stays in this house")
- Traditional gender roles and patriarchal family structures
- Religious values emphasizing marriage preservation
- Generational ties to land and community
- Distrust of "outsiders" and government services

Resource Limitations in Rural Communities



These resource gaps compound the challenges rural IPV survivors face in accessing timely, appropriate intervention services.

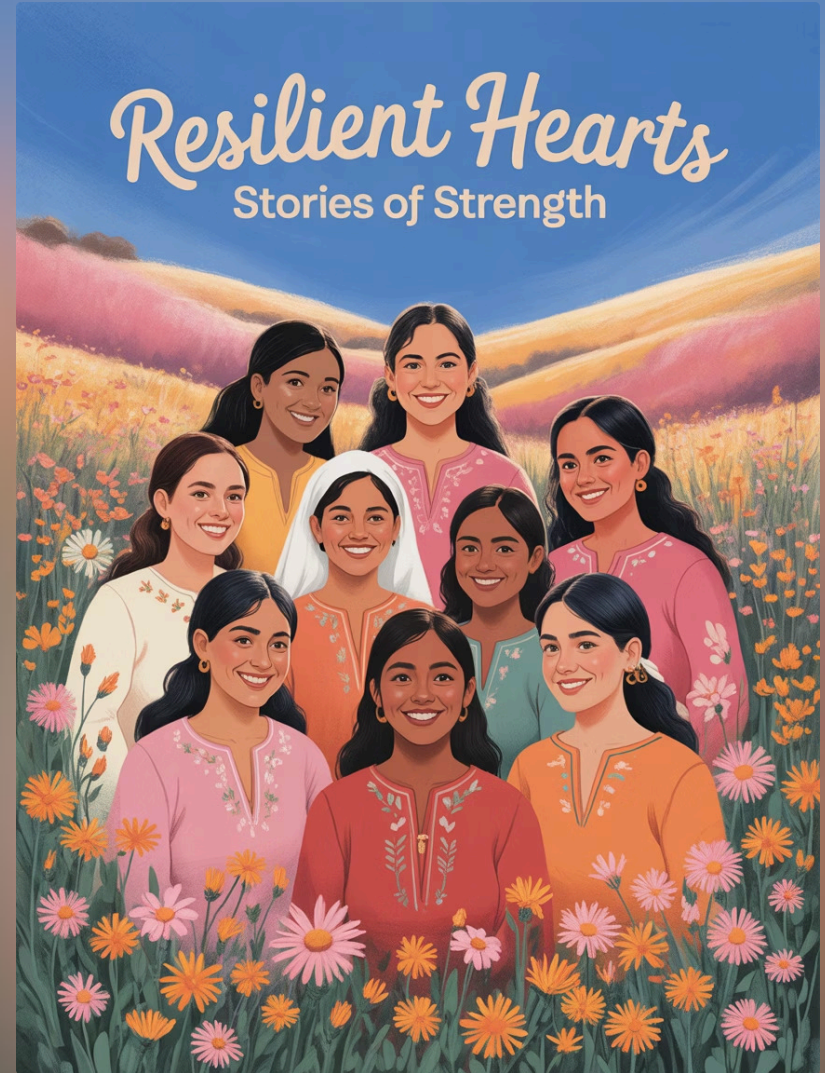


Case Study: "Sarah's Story"

Sarah lives on a cattle ranch 43 miles from the nearest town. Her husband controls their only vehicle and monitors her cell phone. The closest domestic violence shelter is 90 miles away. The local sheriff is her husband's cousin. She has three children and no independent source of income.

What barriers exist for Sarah? What resources might she need to safely leave her situation?

Part II: Intersectional Impacts on Rural IPV



Understanding Intersectionality

"Intersectionality recognizes that people's identities and social positions are shaped by multiple factors, creating unique modes of discrimination and privilege."

—Kimberlé Crenshaw, legal scholar who coined the term

For rural IPV survivors, intersecting factors compound vulnerabilities and create unique barriers to safety.



Race and Ethnicity in Rural IPV

Rural communities are increasingly diverse, with unique cultural contexts that impact IPV experiences:

- Rural Hispanic/Latina survivors often face language barriers and immigration concerns
- Native American women experience IPV at higher rates with complex jurisdictional issues on tribal lands
- Black rural women navigate both racism and sexism when seeking help
- Immigrant women in agricultural communities face deportation threats and economic vulnerability



Native American Survivors: Tribal Jurisdictional Complexities

84%

Lifetime Violence
Percentage of Native
American women who
experience violence in their
lifetime (National Institute of
Justice)

97%

Non-Native
Perpetrators
Most violence against
Native women is committed
by non-Native perpetrators

38%

Service Gap
Of Native women who
needed services were
unable to access them

Jurisdictional gaps between tribal, state, and federal authorities create significant barriers to justice and protection for Native American survivors of IPV.

Poverty and Economic Vulnerability



Economic factors significantly impact rural survivors' ability to escape abuse:

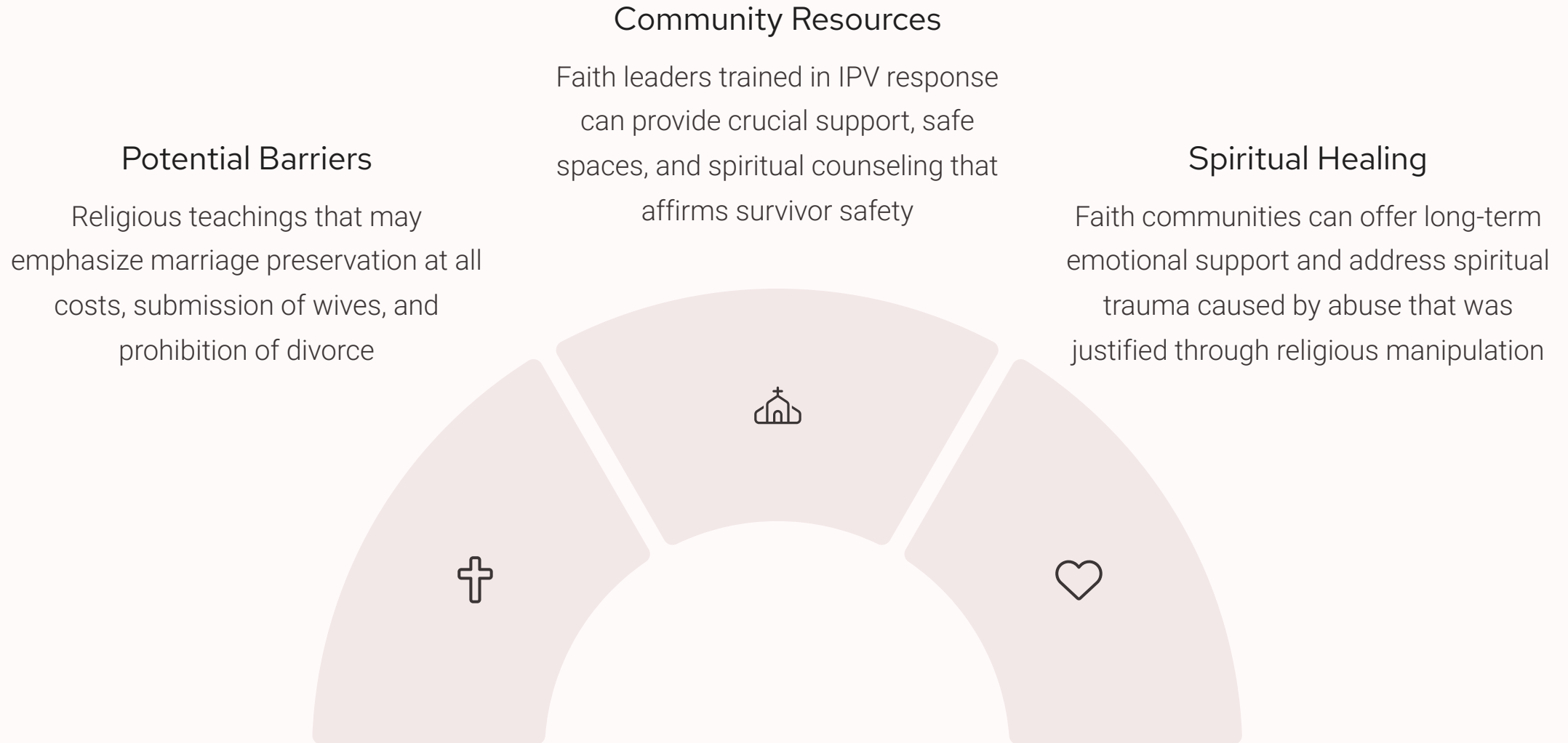
- Higher poverty rates in rural areas (16.1% vs. 12.6% urban)
- Limited employment opportunities with livable wages
- Lack of affordable housing options
- Greater food insecurity (14.5% vs. 10.7% urban)
- Higher rates of uninsured individuals limiting healthcare access

Economic Entanglement in Agricultural Communities

Farm and ranch families face unique economic barriers to leaving abusive situations:

- Joint ownership of land, equipment, and livestock creates complex asset division
- Seasonal income flows and shared business operations
- Multi-generational family property with emotional and cultural significance
- Limited alternative housing options within the community

Faith Communities: Challenge and Opportunity



LGBTQ+ Experiences in Rural Communities

LGBTQ+ survivors in rural settings face unique challenges:

- Greater stigma and less visibility in conservative rural areas
- Fewer LGBTQ+-specific resources and trained providers
- Risk of being outed when seeking services
- Isolation from LGBTQ+ community support networks
- Potential rejection from family and religious communities



Disability and IPV in Rural Settings

- 1 Rural residents with disabilities experience higher rates of IPV with fewer accessible services
- 2 Limited accessible transportation options compound geographic isolation
- 3 Few rural shelters are fully ADA-compliant or offer specialized accommodations
- 4 Lack of accessible communication resources (ASL interpreters, materials in alternative formats)
- 5 Higher dependency on caregivers who may be the abusers

Immigration Status Vulnerabilities

- 1 Undocumented survivors face threats of deportation as a control tactic
- 2 Rural agricultural communities have higher concentrations of immigrant workers with limited legal protections
- 3 Language barriers are more pronounced with fewer interpretation services available
- 4 Limited understanding of legal rights and immigration remedies (U-Visa, VAWA self-petition)



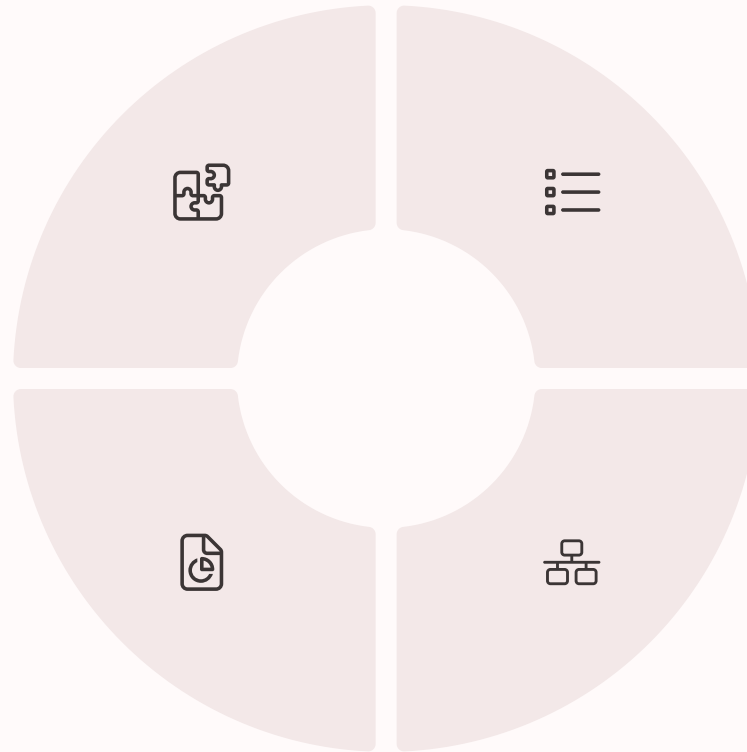
Applying Intersectional Analysis

Identify Multiple Factors

Recognize how different aspects of identity interact to create unique experiences of IPV and barriers to safety

Evaluate Impact

Regularly assess whether interventions are effectively serving all rural survivors across different identity groups



Center Lived Experiences

Prioritize the voices and perspectives of survivors with varied backgrounds when developing interventions

Build Diverse Partnerships

Collaborate with culturally-specific organizations to address complex needs of different populations

Group Discussion

Consider your local rural community context:

- What intersecting factors create unique vulnerabilities for IPV survivors in your area?
- Which populations might be overlooked in current service provision?
- What community resources exist that could better address these intersectional needs?



Part III: Trauma-Informed, Culturally Responsive Approaches



Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

Safety

Creating physical and emotional safety for survivors throughout all interactions and settings

Trustworthiness

Establishing clear expectations and boundaries; maintaining consistency and transparency

Choice

Prioritizing survivor autonomy and decision-making power in all interventions

Collaboration

Working alongside survivors as partners rather than directing their paths

Empowerment

Building on survivor strengths and developing skills for greater independence

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Culturally Responsive Practice

Culturally responsive services acknowledge and respect diverse values, beliefs, and practices while addressing IPV:

- Recognize how cultural context shapes perceptions of abuse, help-seeking, and healing
- Integrate cultural strengths and resources into safety planning
- Adapt intervention models to fit local cultural norms while maintaining core safety principles
- Provide language-appropriate services and materials



Applying Rural Cultural Competence



Build Trust Gradually

Respect wariness of outsiders; establish credibility through consistent presence and community connections



Leverage Rural Strengths

Recognize community interconnectedness, strong informal networks, and natural helping systems



Respect Rural Values

Honor self-reliance while offering help; acknowledge importance of faith, family, and land connections



Bridge Divides

Connect traditional rural values with violence-free relationships; partner with trusted local messengers

Faith-Sensitive Approaches



Strategies for engaging faith communities:

- Partner with clergy to reframe religious texts that have been misused to justify abuse
- Develop faith-based resources that emphasize safety and respect within relationships
- Train faith leaders to recognize warning signs and make appropriate referrals
- Create space for survivors to maintain spiritual practices during healing

Mobile Advocacy: Taking Services to Survivors

Mobile advocacy adapts to rural realities by:

- Meeting survivors where they are—literally—to overcome transportation barriers
- Utilizing safe, neutral locations like libraries, health clinics, or community centers
- Bringing technology, documentation assistance, and resources directly to survivors
- Providing flexible scheduling that accommodates rural work patterns

Technology-Enhanced Services



Telehealth Support

Secure video platforms connecting survivors to counselors, legal advocates, and support groups while overcoming distance barriers



Mobile Applications

Discreet safety apps with quick exit features, emergency contact functions, and resource directories that work with limited connectivity



Text-Based Services

Crisis lines accepting text messages for situations where voice calls might compromise safety or aren't possible due to poor connectivity

Technology Considerations for Rural Areas

Overcoming Rural Digital Divides:

- Design services that work with intermittent internet access
- Provide offline capabilities for safety planning tools
- Create low-bandwidth options for video counseling
- Ensure tech safety planning accounts for shared devices in rural households
- Establish tech-equipped "safe spaces" in community locations



Alternative Transportation Solutions

Volunteer Driver Networks

Trained community volunteers providing confidential transportation to services and court appointments

Rideshare Partnerships

Arrangements with companies like Uber and Lyft to provide free rides for survivors in areas with coverage

Mobile Service Units

Converted vehicles bringing advocacy services directly to remote communities on regular schedules

Transportation Funds

Emergency gas cards, vehicle repair assistance, and rideshare vouchers to support survivor mobility



Safe Housing Innovations



Addressing the rural shelter shortage through creative approaches:

- Scattered site safe housing using existing rental properties
- Host home networks with trained volunteer families
- Public-private partnerships to develop affordable transitional housing
- Hotel voucher programs with confidentiality agreements
- Community land trusts developing survivor-centered housing

Case Study: Rural Tribal Community Response

The White Buffalo Calf Women's Society on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota demonstrates effective culturally-specific approaches:

- Integration of traditional healing practices with contemporary services
- Training community health representatives as IPV first responders
- Working within tribal legal systems while navigating jurisdictional complexities
- Implementing trauma-informed practices within cultural frameworks

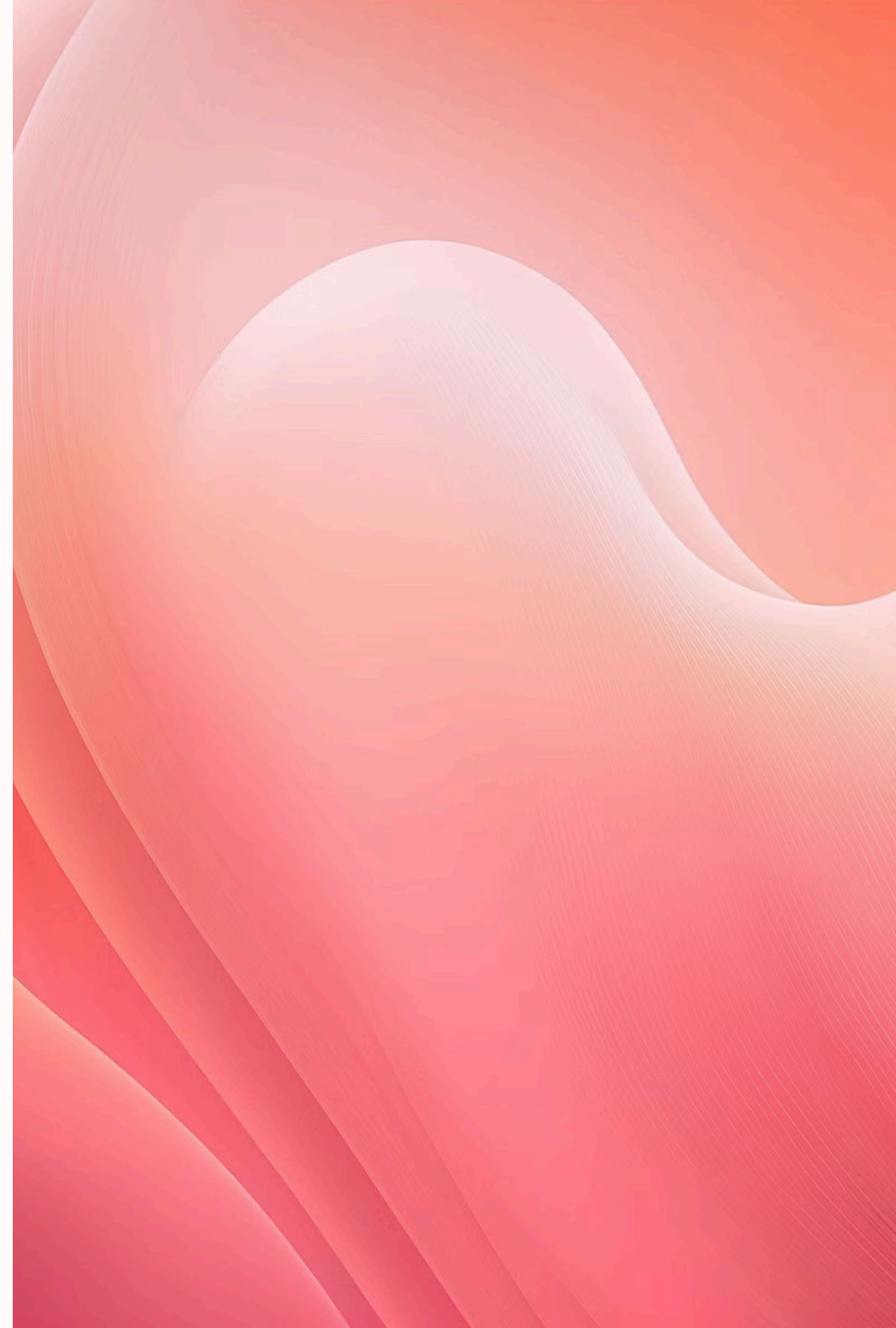
Part IV: Building Coordinated Community Responses



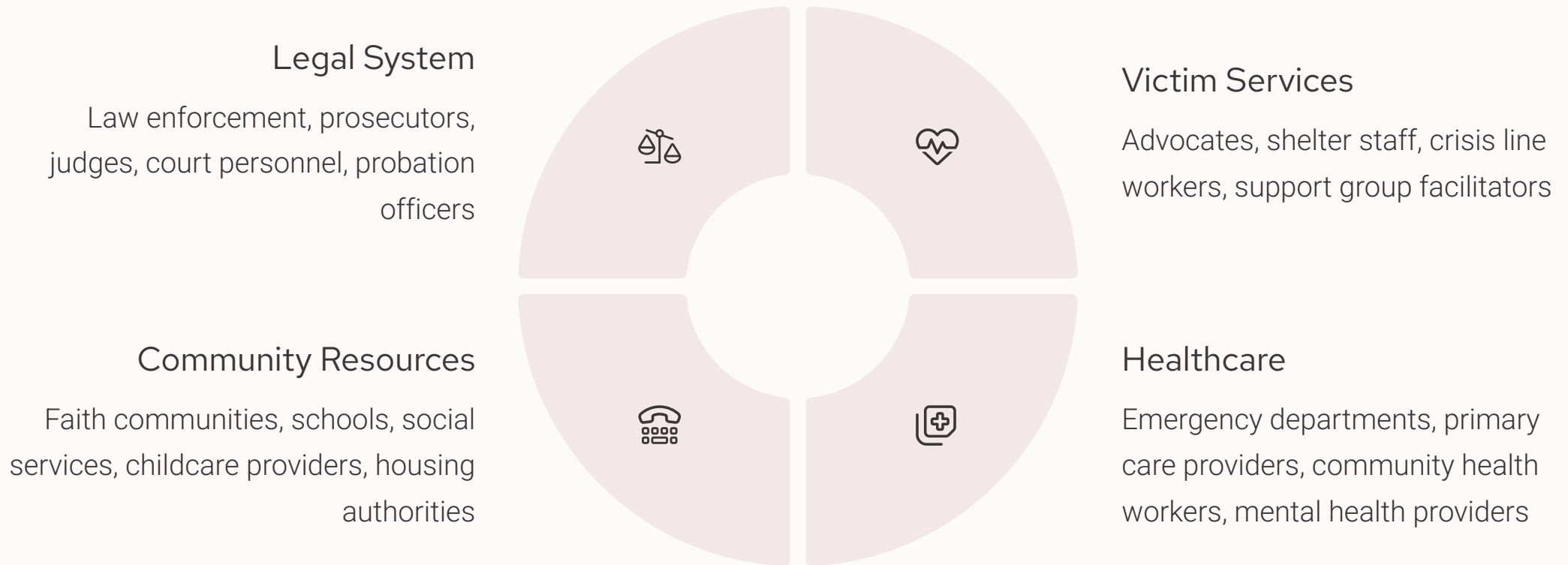
The Power of Coordinated Community Response

"No single agency or professional has the complete knowledge, resources, or authority to effectively intervene in IPV cases. A coordinated approach leverages the unique role of each system while creating consistent, survivor-centered responses."

Effective CCRs create formal structures for communication, collaboration, and accountability across systems that interact with IPV survivors.



Core Partners in Rural CCR



Rural Adaptations of CCR Models

Successful rural CCRs adapt urban models to account for:

- Smaller agencies with staff serving multiple roles
- Longer distances between partners requiring creative meeting solutions
- Closer relationships between professionals requiring careful confidentiality protocols
- Fewer specialized resources necessitating cross-training
- Regional coordination across county lines to maximize resources



Healthcare: A Critical Point of Intervention

Universal Screening

Implementing routine IPV assessment in healthcare settings with trauma-informed protocols

On-Site Advocacy

Integrating community advocates into rural health clinics for immediate warm referrals

Provider Training

Equipping healthcare workers with skills to recognize, respond, and refer appropriately

Documentation

Creating protocols for medically documenting injuries that can support legal remedies



Law Enforcement Partnerships



Enhancing rural law enforcement response:

- Joint investigation protocols between advocates and officers
- Lethality assessment programs to identify high-risk cases
- Evidence collection training specific to rural contexts
- Multi-jurisdictional agreements for backup response
- Officer wellness resources addressing vicarious trauma

Judicial System Innovations

- 1 Remote protective order hearings reducing transportation barriers and safety risks
- 2 Circuit-riding specialized domestic violence courts serving multiple counties
- 3 Court-based advocate programs providing support throughout legal processes
- 4 Judicial training on rural dynamics of IPV and trauma impacts



Schools as Partners in Prevention and Response



Prevention Education

Age-appropriate healthy relationship curriculum integrated across K-12 schools



Staff Training

Equipping teachers and staff to recognize warning signs and make appropriate referrals



Support Services

School-based counseling resources for children exposed to domestic violence



Safety Planning

Protocols for addressing custody issues and maintaining child safety in school settings

Engaging Informal Community Networks

Successful rural CCRs engage beyond formal systems to include:

- Faith communities and pastoral leaders
- Local businesses and employers
- Volunteer fire departments and EMS
- Civic organizations
- Agricultural extension agents and farm organizations
- Tribal elders and cultural leaders



Confidentiality in Small Communities



Clear Protocols

Establishing strict information-sharing guidelines that prioritize survivor privacy while enabling necessary coordination



Informed Consent

Developing detailed release forms that specify exactly what information can be shared, with whom, and for how long



Regular Training

Conducting ongoing education about confidentiality requirements for all CCR partners, including VAWA, HIPAA, and other relevant regulations

Case Study: Rural CCR Success

The Four Corners CCR in southwestern Colorado demonstrates effective rural coordination by:

- Establishing a regional approach across multiple counties to pool resources
- Implementing a shared electronic referral system with strict privacy controls
- Creating mobile multi-disciplinary teams that travel to remote communities
- Developing cultural adaptations for diverse populations including Native American and Hispanic/Latino communities



Part V: Policy and Systems Change for Rural IPV Response

Rural-Specific Policy Needs

- 1 Current IPV policies and funding formulas often disadvantage rural communities through urban-centric approaches
- 2 Population-based funding formulas fail to account for higher costs of service delivery across large geographic areas
- 3 Grant requirements may be unrealistic for small rural organizations with limited administrative capacity
- 4 One-size-fits-all program models may not translate effectively to rural contexts

Funding Innovations for Rural Services



Geography-Based Formulas

Advocating for funding calculations that include distance factors and service area size



Simplified Applications

Streamlining grant processes for small organizations with limited administrative staff



Collaborative Grants

Enabling regional partnerships where multiple agencies share a single grant with one lead fiscal agent



Flexible Funding

Allowing creative problem-solving through unrestricted funds that address unique rural barriers

Rural Transportation Policy



Addressing the critical transportation gap through policy change:

- Expanding rural public transit funding with safety-focused route planning
- Creating dedicated transportation funding streams within IPV grants
- Developing insurance and liability frameworks for volunteer driver programs
- Implementing emergency transportation vouchers through healthcare systems

Telehealth and Broadband Access

- 1 Advocating for universal broadband access as a safety issue for rural IPV survivors
- 2 Supporting telehealth parity laws ensuring equal insurance reimbursement for virtual services
- 3 Establishing community connectivity hubs with privacy protections in accessible locations
- 4 Developing low-bandwidth service options for areas with limited connectivity





Housing Policy Solutions

Rural-Specific Vouchers

Advocating for dedicated housing assistance programs accounting for limited rental markets in rural areas

Zoning Reforms

Updating restrictive rural housing policies to allow accessory dwelling units and flexible housing options

Property Rights

Strengthening legal protections for survivors on family farms and jointly-owned rural properties

Home Repair Funds

Creating dedicated funding for safety-focused home modifications allowing survivors to remain in place safely

Tribal Sovereignty and Jurisdictional Reform

Supporting policy changes to address jurisdictional gaps affecting Native survivors:

- Full implementation and funding of tribal provisions in the Violence Against Women Act
- Strengthening tribal court authority over non-Native perpetrators
- Establishing clear cross-jurisdictional protocols between tribal, state, and federal authorities
- Supporting tribal-led, culturally-grounded intervention programs



Workforce Development for Rural Services



Grow-Your-Own Programs

Partnerships with community colleges to train local residents for advocacy and intervention roles, addressing recruitment challenges



Remote Training Options

Accessible professional development through online and low-bandwidth distance learning platforms for rural practitioners



Virtual Supervision

Telehealth supervision models connecting rural providers with specialized clinical support to prevent isolation and burnout

Data Collection and Rural Research



Addressing rural data gaps through policy and practice:

- Requiring geographic identifiers in national IPV research
- Funding rural-specific research on intervention effectiveness
- Developing rural-appropriate evaluation methods
- Supporting community-based participatory research approaches
- Creating accessible data systems for small rural organizations

Building Rural Policy Advocacy Capacity

Local Stories

Collecting and amplifying rural survivor experiences to illustrate policy needs

Data Visualization

Creating compelling visual representations of rural service gaps and needs

Coalition Building

Forming diverse partnerships across sectors to strengthen advocacy voice

Policymaker Education

Developing relationships with rural legislators and providing concrete policy solutions

Action Planning: Your Next Steps

Take a few minutes to reflect on specific actions you can take to enhance rural IPV response in your community:

- What new partnerships could you develop to address intersectional needs?
- Which trauma-informed, culturally responsive approaches could you implement?
- How might you strengthen coordinated community response efforts?
- What policy changes would most benefit rural survivors in your region?

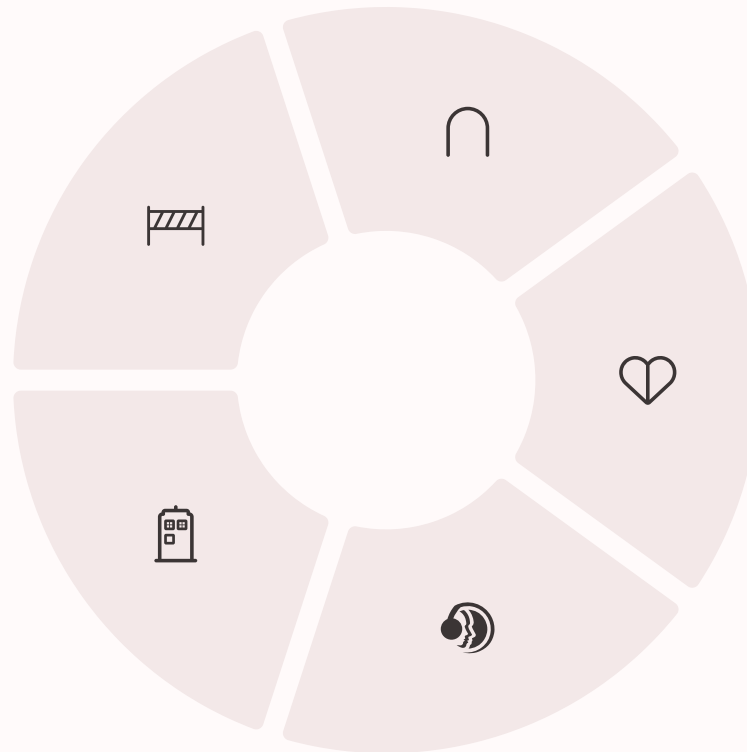
Key Takeaways

Unique Barriers

Rural IPV survivors face distinct geographic, social, and cultural barriers requiring specialized approaches

Policy Change

Sustainable improvement requires advocating for rural-specific policies and funding formulas



Intersectionality Matters

Effective interventions must address how multiple factors including race, poverty, and faith shape survivor experiences

Trauma-Informed Care

All rural services must recognize trauma impacts while honoring survivor autonomy and building on strengths

Coordinated Response

No single agency can address rural IPV alone; collaboration across systems creates safety nets despite distance

Contact Information & Resources

National Resources

- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
- Rural Health Information Hub: ruralhealthinfo.org
- National Indigenous Women's Resource Center: niwrc.org
- Rural Grant Resources: grants.gov/rural

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