

# *Protective Orders in Rural and Urban Areas*

## *A Multiple Perspective Study*

TK LOGAN  
LISA SHANNON  
ROBERT WALKER  
*University of Kentucky*

---

---

*This study is one of the first to examine the protective order process, barriers, and outcomes by combining qualitative and quantitative research in rural and urban areas. State statutes suggest the protective order process should be fair, consistent, and accessible to all women in the state. However, study results suggest that (a) the process of obtaining protective orders varies depending on community context; (b) although there are barriers to obtaining and enforcing protective orders regardless of geographic region, rural women appear to have more barriers; and (c) differences exist in victimization experiences, protective order stipulations, violations, and perceived effectiveness among rural and urban women.*

**Keywords:** *protective orders; rural areas; urban areas*

---

---

*Protective orders, also known as restraining orders, are civil remedies that were developed to provide domestic violence victims with a way to prohibit contact, or at least violent contact, by their offending partners (Finn, 1989). States began creating statutory authority for protective orders in the 1960s and 1970s to give law enforcement and the courts more authority to keep violent intimate partner offenders away from victims (Schneider, 2000). In most cases, there are temporary or emergency protective orders*

---

AUTHORS' NOTE: The data collection and report preparation were funded, in part, by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and by the University of Kentucky General Clinical Research Organization funded by a National Institute of Health Grant. We also wish to thank each of the respondents who gave us their time to complete the surveys and interviews, the community agency that supported our efforts, and others who helped with the data collection.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, Vol. 11 No. 7, July 2005 876-911  
DOI: 10.1177/1077801205276985  
© 2005 Sage Publications

as well as longer term orders that can prescribe no contact or no violent contact for up to several years. In spite of growing legal mechanisms for protection against abuse, it is clear that much complexity surrounds the understanding, implementation, and the overall effectiveness of protective orders (Eigenberg, McGuffee, Berry & Hall, 2003; Ptacek, 1999; Schneider, 2000). However, there has been limited research focus on the comprehensive examination of the accessibility and implementation of protective orders in a variety of environments including rural and urban areas where legal procedures may be very different in routine practice. In other words, the mere presence of protective order statutes does not denote that victims experience the remedies set forth in the law; barriers and implementation of protective orders can greatly influence the effectiveness of protective orders.

In general, women seeking protective orders report a history of severe violence (Carlson, Harris, & Holden, 1999; Gondolf, McWilliams, Hart, & Streuhling, 1994; Keilitz, Hannaford, & Efke, 1997; Klein, 1996; Ptacek, 1999). However, research indicates there is wide variation in the number of women who actually obtain protective orders, with 20% to 63% of women seeking protective orders being successful in obtaining one (Gist et al., 2001; Gondolf et al., 1994; Harrell & Smith, 1996; Holt, Kernic, Lumley, Wolf & Rivara, 2002; Klein, 1996; Zoellner et al., 2000). Furthermore, even if an order is obtained, it is not always effective. Various studies report between 23% and 70% of women experience a violation of the protective order (Carlson et al., 1999; Harrell & Smith, 1996; Keilitz et al., 1997; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). The wide range for both obtaining and enforcing orders probably varies across studies for multiple reasons including methodological reasons as well as contextual or environmental reasons.

Protective orders are one of the few legal remedies available for intimate partner violence victims (Gist et al., 2001). Therefore, it is critical to understand the process and barriers women experience, especially given that the protective order process may differ depending on environmental circumstances, for example among women living in rural and urban areas. Although the rates of intimate partner violence have been found to be similar in rural and urban areas (Bachman, 1994; Bachman & Saltzman, 1995), the

experiences of rural women may be very different (Fishwick, 1998; Ivy Fiene, 1995; Kershner, Long, & Anderson, 1998; Tice, 1990; Websdale, 1998). These differences in experiences can be attributed to limited access to services; low education rates; norms and attitudes that influence service delivery; geographic isolation; poverty; and limited employment, childcare, and housing opportunities (Booth, Ross, & Rost, 1999; Doyle, 1998; Geissinger, Lazzari, Porter, & Tungate, 1993; Gesler & Ricketts, 1992; Goeckermann, Hamberger, & Barber, 1994; Porter, 1993; Websdale, 1998). Furthermore, differences in obtaining and enforcement of protective orders may contribute to major differences in the experience of intimate partner violence. Protective order policies associated with specific statute requirements must be examined under various contextual environments for a full understanding of the barriers and implementation of the policies.

This study uses multiple perspectives to better understand the variations in the protective order process, barriers, and outcomes. Although state legislation implies that the protective order process and outcomes should be similar across jurisdictions, little research has focused on examining contextual differences for rural and urban women. The experiences of rural and urban women may be very different in navigating the protective order process because of unique constraints emerging from the environment. It is important to gain an understanding of the complexity of the protective process as well as unique barriers encountered by women in different environments. Three rural counties and one urban county in one state were targeted for analysis across all dimensions of data collection. The multiple perspectives included in this study are (a) state police data, (b) court docket data, (c) key informant interviews, (d) focus group results from women who did not currently have protective orders, and (e) individual interviews with women granted protective orders.

## METHOD

### SELECTED COUNTIES

The three rural counties selected for this study had between 78% and 100% of the population considered rural as classified by

the 2000 census; all three rural counties had Beale Urban Influence Codes of seven (Beale & Johnson, 1995; Butler & Beale, 1994). The urban county selected for this study had only 4% of its population defined as rural by the 2000 census and had a Beale code of two. Urban influence codes divide counties into nine metro or nonmetro groups according to the official metro status based on population and commuting data (Economic Research Service [ERS], 2003). An Urban Influence Code of seven would include counties not adjacent to a metro area containing a city with at least 10,000 residents, in contrast to a code of two that entails a small metro area with fewer than 1 million residents (ERS, 2003). According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (2000), the total population for all three rural areas was 97,108 (ranging from 25,277 to 42,441), and the population for the urban area was 260,512.

## **DATA SOURCES**

### **State Data on Protective Orders Issued for the Four Counties and Court Docket Data**

The Kentucky State police provided Emergency Protective Order (EPO) and Domestic Violence Order (DVO) data estimates overall and by county for fiscal year 2002. Dockets for each court system were provided each court day by the court clerk. Docket data were collected by interviewers who observed 99% of the court sessions in the urban area and 92% of the court sessions in the rural area during fiscal year 2002. For each case, interviewers recorded the case outcome. Data for the missed sessions were collected through the court information system for a total of 146 court sessions in the rural area and 140 court sessions in the urban area.

### **Provider System Key Informant Interviews**

Two phases of the key informant interviews were conducted. Phase I involved interviews to obtain a description of the official protective order process in each county. These interviews were conducted between July and September 2002. Interviews with key informants in each of the three target rural counties were

conducted with (a) circuit court clerks in each county; (b) representatives from the domestic violence shelters (one of the shelters served two of the target counties); (c) a representative of the Appalachian Research and Defense Fund, which served women from two of the target counties; and, (d) a domestic violence advocate from the local mental health facility for one of the target counties. Interviews were conducted in the urban area with (a) the director of victim advocate services with the County Attorney's Office, (b) the supervisor in the domestic violence clerk's office, and (c) a legal advocate from the local domestic violence shelter.

Phase II involved 109 interviews with key informants (71 rural and 38 urban) from July to October, 2002. Overall, there was a 95% response rate. There was a 4% nonresponse rate in the rural area, and a 7% refusal rate in the urban area. The key informants included representatives from the criminal justice system, including judges, law enforcement, court clerks, and prosecutors ( $n = 34$ ); other service agency representatives such as mental health professionals, health care, hospital services, and social services ( $n = 47$ ); and victim services provider representatives, including advocates, shelter staff, and attorneys specializing in victims services ( $n = 28$ ). Lists of key informants were generated by contacting key community agencies from each of the targeted counties by phone. In addition, each survey participant was asked to provide names of other individuals in their community that they thought should be included in the survey. The phone interviews took approximately 10 min. to complete.

#### **Focus Groups With Women Without Protective Orders**

A total of 128 adult women volunteered to participate in focus groups from July to August 2002. Two focus groups were conducted in each target county for a total of eight focus groups ( $n = 98$  rural and  $n = 30$  urban women). Women were recruited for participation using advertisements in the local newspaper and radio public service announcements. Also, flyers were placed at bus stops, laundry mats, grocery stores, libraries, coffee shops, bookstores and other key community locations. Key community contacts were also used in the rural area for recruitment. The primary focus of these groups was to understand rural and urban

differences from the perspective of community women and barriers to health and mental health services as well as barriers to criminal justice services. Questions during the focus groups were structured to gather information about these services in each respective area.

Of those that preregistered for the focus groups, 81% of the urban women and 79% of the rural women attended the actual session. Eligibility criteria were that women be 18 years or older and not currently have or were not seeking a protective order against a male intimate partner to ensure nonduplication of study participation. Barriers to obtaining and enforcing protective orders will be summarized in this article; more detailed information about methods and results can be found in Logan, Stevenson, Evans, and Leukefeld (2004).

#### **Protective Order Recipient Interviews**

A sample of 450 women ( $n = 250$  urban women and  $n = 200$  rural women) with protective orders participated as part of a larger research study from February 2001 to February 2003. After being granted a protective order by the court, women were offered information about the study and were asked to participate. If interested, face-to-face interviews were conducted approximately 1 to 4 weeks after the court granted the protective order. Interviews lasted approximately 4 hrs and covered topics relating to women's health, mental health, substance use, and victimization.

#### **ANALYSIS**

State, docket, and interview data were analyzed with bivariate descriptive statistics. Open-ended interview questions, key informant, and focus group data were analyzed using themes developed from participant responses. About 21% of the total responses for the key informant and interview data were independently coded. Any discrepancies were discussed and clarified until 100% agreement was reached.

## RESULTS

### RURAL AND URBAN DIFFERENCES IN THE PROTECTIVE ORDER PROCESS

#### General Protective Order Process

To be eligible for a protective order in the state targeted for the study, a person must be married to the respondent, formerly married, have a child in common, currently or previously lived together in an intimate relationship, or be related by consanguinity or affinity within the second degree (Kentucky Revised Statutes [KRS], 1992). The initial step for a person experiencing domestic violence is to file a petition for an EPO, which is then reviewed by a judge who determines whether evidence of domestic violence and abuse exists. If, on review of the petition, the court determines that the allegations indicate the presence of an immediate and present danger of domestic violence and abuse, the court issues an EPO (KRS, 1992). An EPO is a temporary order and can be in effect for a fixed time period that does not exceed 14 days. On the issuance of an EPO, a date for a full hearing is set for no later than the expiration date of the EPO. The respondent must be served with a copy of the EPO before it can be enforced (KRS, 1992). The hearing is a mechanism to enable the court to decide whether to dismiss the order or to grant a DVO. In addition, the respondent must be notified of the DVO hearing date. An EPO may be reissued for a period not to exceed 14 days if the respondent has not been served notice of the EPO and the hearing within the initial timeframe. Statewide data purport an average of 17.8 EPOs issued per 1,000 female residents aged 15 and older. As Table 1 indicates, the urban county had more EPOs issued per 1,000 females aged 15 and older than the rural counties ( $z = 2.9, p < .01$ ) selected for this study.

At the court date, a judge can issue a DVO if it is proven by the preponderance of evidence that an act of domestic violence or abuse has occurred and may again occur in the future. Reports from statewide data indicate that, on average, nine DVOs were issued per 1,000 female residents aged 15 and older statewide. The urban county had more DVOs issued per 1,000 females aged 15 and older compared to the rural areas selected for this study

**TABLE 1**  
**State and Docket Observation Data**

	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>
Official state data		
Number of EPOs issued <sup>a</sup>	11.7	30.0**
Number of DVOs issued <sup>a</sup>	6.9	11.5
% nonservice rate	46.9	18.2
Docket observation data		
Total court sessions	146.0	140.0
Total court activity	1,693.0	2,622.0
% preadjudication activity	22.0	11.0**
% postadjudication activity	26.0	25.0
% adjudicated cases	52.0	64.0**
% DVOs issued	44.0	44.2
% EPOs dismissed	52.4	50.2
% transferred to circuit court	3.6	5.6

NOTE: EPO = Emergency Protective Order; DVO = Domestic Violence Order.

a. Per 1,000 individuals.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

(see Table 1). A DVO can be issued for any time length (at the judge's discretion) for a period not to exceed 3 years. Prior to the expiration of the DVO, if victims feel a need for further protection, they are required to file a petition for an extension of the DVO (KRS, 1992). The number of times an order may be reissued is not limited. According to KRS 403.725, there should be no filing fees, court costs, or fees for petition service associated with filing a protective order to ensure access to protective orders across all subgroups of the population.

#### The Protective Order Process—State and Docket Data

Table 1 also shows the court docket data results. Overall, judges in the rural counties had 1,693 protective order cases or case activities in 146 court sessions, whereas judges in the urban area had 2,622 cases or case activities in 140 court sessions. There was some duplication of persons in these cases—the same people may have appeared before the judges on multiple occasions. For example, a woman may have to obtain a protective order from the court and at a later date obtain an amendment to the order. Both of these instances would have been recorded independently in the docket data.

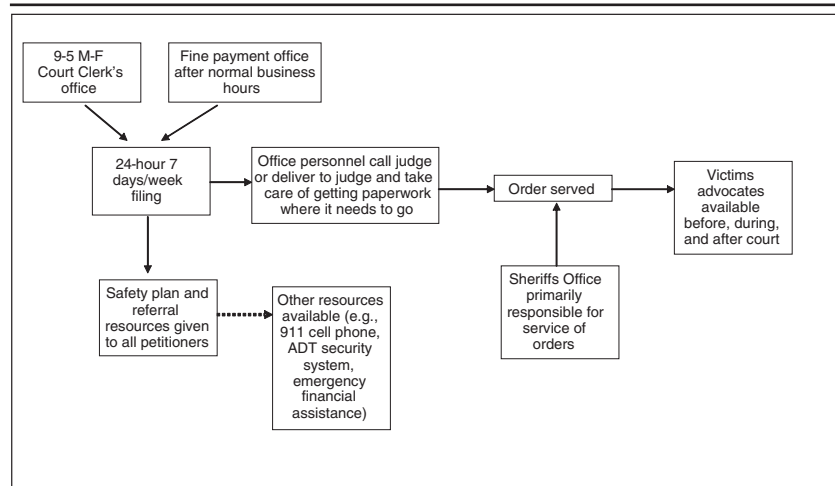


Much of the court activity was preadjudication, which included extending an EPO and issuing a summons or warrant for respondents to petitions. In the rural area, 22% of the case activity was preadjudication, whereas in the urban area, 11% of the cases were classified into this category ( $z = 9.8, p < .01$ ). In the rural area, 26% of cases were classified as postadjudication compared to 25% of the urban cases. Postadjudication activities included extending a prior DVO, amending an order, contempt hearings, and case reviews. In the rural area, only 52% of the cases were actual hearings to adjudicate a protective order resulting in either a dismissal or granting of a protective order compared to 64% in the urban area ( $z = 7.8, p < .01$ ). Of the cases that were adjudicated in the rural area, 44% resulted in a DVO (ranging from 29.9% to 60.6%), and 52.4% resulted in a dismissal of the EPO (38% to 67.7%). In the urban area, 44.2% of adjudicated cases resulted in a DVO, and 50.2% resulted in an EPO dismissal.

**Protective Order Process—Phase I:  
Provider Key Informant Perspectives**

Phase I key informant interviews examined in depth the protective order process. Results suggest that the courts in the four counties handle protective orders in various ways, but each has some degree of specialization available for these cases. The urban and two of the rural counties address domestic violence in District Court unless divorce or child custody is pending, in which case it is heard in Circuit Court. One rural county addresses domestic violence in Family Court, allowing protective orders and divorce actions to be handled in the same proceedings.

*Urban protective order process.* Key informants in the urban area described a 24-hr, 7-day-per-week access for filing a petition for a protective order that included use of a domestic violence clerk's office in the District Court building during business hours and a fine payment window in the same building on weekends, holidays, and evenings (see Figure 1). After filing for a protective order petition, the office personnel deliver the petition to the judge or contact the judge to have the order signed and served. The Sheriff's Office has primary responsibility for serving protective orders in the urban county and has an established victim's service division.

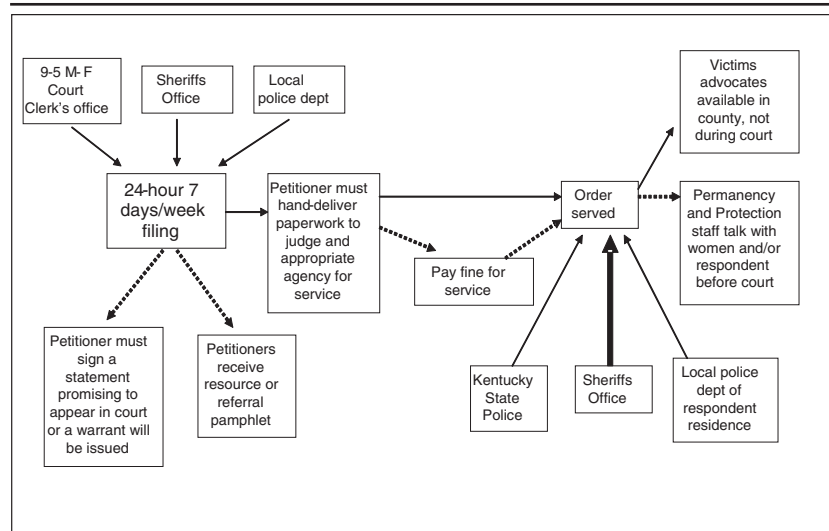


**Figure 1: The Urban Protective Order Process as Reported in Phase I of the Key Informant Survey**

NOTE: Dotted lines represent the resources are available to some women.

When a protective order petition is filed, the petitioner receives a safety plan brochure that instructs the individual how to protect oneself when leaving the abuser. A list of community resources, pertinent telephone numbers, and an explanation of court processes are given to the petitioner as well. There are other resources in the urban county available, depending on the situation, including individualized safety planning, lock change programs, 9-1-1 cell phone programs, an ADT security program, and emergency financial assistance from the Sheriff’s Office. There is also a local spouse abuse shelter. The shelter helps women file protective order petitions and locate resources and offers group counseling and court advocacy. In addition, the county attorney’s office has a victim’s advocate program to help women through the protective order process and, if necessary, criminal proceedings. The victim advocates generally initiate phone contact with petitioners prior to the court hearing to explain protection options, and they are available to petitioners after the DVO hearings for additional information. No fees are charged to individuals for protective orders.

*Rural protective order process.* Key informants in the rural areas described a similar 24-hr access to file an EPO either through the



**Figure 2: The Rural Protective Order Process as Conveyed Through Phase I of the Key Informant Survey**

NOTE: Dotted lines represent events that happen in some of the counties but not all three.

Circuit Clerk's Office during business hours or through the Sheriff's Office and the local police departments after hours (see Figure 2). If the protective order petition is filed during business hours, the petitioner is usually expected to hand-deliver the paperwork to the judge and other necessary agencies to have the order signed and the respondent served. In two of the rural counties, the Sheriff's Offices have primary responsibility for serving protective orders, although the respective police departments or the Kentucky State Police may also serve orders if necessary. In one of the rural counties protective orders are served by the law enforcement agency that presides over the respondent's place of residence. In one rural county, the petitioner is required to sign a statement in which she or he promises to appear in court on a given time and day. If she or he does not appear in court, a warrant is issued to bring the petitioner to court to inform the judge as to why she or he did not appear on the court date.

Advocates from local shelters are available in all of the target rural counties to advise the petitioner and explain programs and procedures. However, these advocates are not necessarily accessible at the time of filing or during the court hearing. In two of the

rural counties, the petitioner receives a resource or referral pamphlet at the time of filing. In one rural county, the state protective services agency speaks with the petitioner and respondent prior to court. In another rural county, a representative from the state protective services agency speaks with the petitioner before court. Usually, no charge is imposed to file for a petition or for service of a protective order. However, in one of the rural counties, it was mentioned that the petitioner may be charged for serving the order, if the order is to be served after business hours. The frequency and amount of charge depends on the officer assisting in filing the petition.

**Protective Order Process—Phase II:  
Provider Key Informant Perspectives**

Information about professionals' views of the protective order process was gathered during Phase II, key informant interviews (see Table 2).

*Reasons women seek protective orders.* The majority of rural and urban key informants reported they thought safety and the need to stop the violence were the main reasons women seek protective orders. The next most commonly cited reason for seeking a protective order for both rural (54%) and urban (26%) respondents was fear. Significantly more rural key informants reported this reason than urban respondents ( $\chi^2[1] = 7.4, p < .01$ ). Almost one fifth of respondents in both the rural and urban areas indicated they believed women seek protective orders for divorce, custody, and property issues as well as for retaliation, punishment, and revenge.

*Views of overall problems with protective orders.* Both the rural and urban key informants cited the fact that a protective order was "just a piece of paper" as a problem with protective orders. More urban respondents mentioned this issue as a problem than rural respondents ( $\chi^2[1] = 6.7, p < .05$ ). In addition, respondents indicated that enforcement by the criminal justice system, the petitioner's level of involvement with the judicial system (e.g., not reporting violations), and service of the order were problems with protective orders. Consistent with findings in the court docket

**TABLE 2**  
**Rural and Urban Provider Key Informant Perspectives**

	% Rural (n = 71)	% Urban (n = 38)
Reasons women seek protective orders		
Protection, safety, or need to stop violence	89	90
Fear	54	26**
Divorce, custody, or property	16	18
Retaliation, punishment, or revenge	16	18
Overall problems with protective orders		
"Just a piece of paper"	25	50*
Enforcement by the criminal justice system	39	26
Petitioner's level of involvement	14	24
Serving the order	25	8*
Reasons for not receiving order		
Statute or evidentiary issues	35	61*
Attitudes within criminal justice system	28	24
Factors contributing to dismissal		
Statute requirements not met	25	47*
Parties request protective order be dropped	41	24
Petitioner is a poor presenter	17	21
Attitudes of the criminal justice system	21	18
Main reasons a woman chooses to drop		
Desire to reconcile	52	42
Coerced, intimidated, or pressured by perpetrator	45	55
Petitioner is dependent on perpetrator	42	32
Barriers to obtaining		
Lack of resources of the petitioner	44	50
Fear of perpetrator	31	34
Lack of knowledge of the criminal justice system	21	42*
Criminal justice system limitations	25	21
Barriers to enforcing		
Criminal justice system limitations	41	40
No reporting or follow through by petitioner	27	40
Serving the order	17	24
Criminal justice attitudes	32	11*

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

review, more rural respondents than urban respondents reported that serving the order was a barrier ( $\chi^2[1] = 4.9, p < .05$ ).

*Reasons for not receiving a protective order.* The main reason cited by key informants for women not receiving a protective order was statutory or evidentiary issues (35% of rural respondents and 61% of urban respondents,  $\chi^2[1] = 6.4, p < .05$ ). The second most frequently cited reason in both the rural (28%) and urban (24%) areas

for women not receiving a protective order concerned attitudes within the criminal justice system.

*Factors contributing to dismissal.* Both the rural and urban respondents were likely to cite (a) not meeting statute requirements (25% of rural and 47% of urban,  $\chi^2[1] = 5.4, p < .05$ ) and (b) the petitioner requesting the protective order be dropped (41% of rural and 24% of urban) as the most common reasons for dismissal of a protective order. In addition, the petitioner being poor presenters (17% of rural and 21% of urban) and attitudes of the criminal justice system (21% of rural and 18% of urban) were also cited as reasons for dismissal.

*Main reasons a woman chooses to drop a protective order.* Both rural and urban key informants agreed on the three most prevalent reasons why a woman would choose to drop a protective order: (a) the petitioner's desire to reconcile; (b) the petitioner being coerced, intimidated, and pressured by the perpetrator; and (c) the petitioner being dependent on the perpetrator.

## RURAL AND URBAN DIFFERENCES IN BARRIERS TO OBTAINING AND ENFORCING PROTECTIVE ORDERS

### Barriers to Obtaining and Enforcing Protective Orders—State Data

Official state data suggest an important difference in nonservice rates with a 46.9% nonservice rate in the rural areas on average (ranging from 20.7% to 65.5% across the three counties) compared to an 18.2% nonservice rate in the urban area (see Table 1).

### Barriers to Obtaining and Enforcing Protective Orders—Phase II: Provider Key Informant

*Perspectives.* The key informant interviews with professionals from the community who work with victims also provided important information about barriers to obtaining and enforcing a protective order (see Table 2). About half of the rural (44%) and urban (50%) key informants indicated that the biggest barrier for women to file for a protective order was the lack of resources. Respondents indicated that without the resources to actually

leave a perpetrator, a protective order would probably be ineffective. The second most common barrier mentioned in both the rural and urban groups was fear of the perpetrator. More urban respondents than rural respondents cited lack of knowledge of the criminal justice system as an important barrier ( $\chi^2[1]= 5.4, p < .05$ ). In addition, about a quarter of rural and urban respondents indicated that criminal justice system limitations were also barriers, including problems with the court system (e.g., hours inconvenient, incompetence) and problems with court staff lacking knowledge or the willingness to help women.

The most frequently mentioned barriers to enforcing protective orders according to key informants were (a) criminal justice limitations (e.g., the bureaucratic nature of the system, the lack of response to violations and an overloaded system), (b) the lack of follow-through by the petitioner (e.g., not reporting violations), (c) problems with serving the order, and (d) attitudes of the criminal justice system (e.g., the lack of education and knowledge about domestic violence, the politics involved in the criminal justice system, and negative attitudes toward domestic violence victims). More of the rural respondents rated attitudes of the criminal justice system as barriers (32%) than urban respondents (11%;  $\chi^2[1] = 6.4, p < .05$ ).

#### **Barriers to Obtaining and Enforcing Protective Orders—Focus Groups**

*Demographics.* Women in the rural focus group sample were, on average, 37 years old; in the urban focus group sample, women were, on average, 43 years old. The majority of participants in the rural area were White (99%), whereas the urban participants were 77% White, 10% African American, and 13% other (e.g., Native American, biracial) ( $\chi^2[2]= 20, p < .01$ ). In addition, the majority of women (85% rural and 70% urban) had lived in the county for 10 or more years. Overall, only a small percentage of women from either the rural or urban areas reported having used rape crisis services (1%), local crisis hotlines (1%), protective orders (6.5%), victim's advocates (3.5%), or a women's shelter (3.5%) in the past 5 years.

*Limited knowledge.* Both rural and urban focus group participants indicated that many women do not know or understand that protective orders are available to help them with partner

violence. In addition, the women in the groups had misconceptions about protective orders and what happens to women who obtain these orders. For example, there were misperceptions about how women would be arrested or held accountable to the court with the perpetrator if the order was violated.

*System bureaucracy.* Problems with system bureaucracy were mentioned by both rural and urban women. Participants in the focus groups talked about how the procedure of reporting a crime may be overwhelming for many women. Participants suggested that not only can feeling threatened by the court system prevent a woman from ever pressing charges, but even if she does press charges, the bureaucracy of the system makes the procedure very cumbersome. For example, participants cited examples of bureaucratic obstacles such as warrants never being served and paperwork disappearing. Participants suggested that a woman must be focused, forceful, and persistent to overcome bureaucratic obstacles with criminal justice services.

*Perception of the lack of efficacy.* Participants from both rural and urban focus groups talked about the fact that they didn't really believe the criminal justice system could reliably help women. There were two main reasons for their perception of the lack of efficacy of the criminal justice system. The first reason derived from the general perception that the police cannot be everywhere all the time. Rural and urban participants indicated they believed that although a protective order gives a woman legal recourse, it is still just a piece of paper and won't protect a woman if someone really wants to hurt her. Participants suggested there may be a perception that protective orders don't work because there have been a lot of cases in the media about how protective orders and law enforcement have failed to protect women. The second perception regarding the lack of efficacy centered on the lack of enforcement of protective orders. Both rural and urban participants mentioned that even if a woman reported a protective order violation, there would be little or no consequences for the perpetrator, so pursuing a protective order may be seen as a waste of time.

*Lack of resources.* Lack of resources was mentioned as a barrier only in the rural focus groups. According to participants, limited



housing, job opportunities, and child care make leaving an abusive partner on which one is financially dependent very difficult.

*Costs.* Although clearly the state statute on protective orders indicates that petitioners should not be charged fees, rural women described charges associated with protective orders. Several women in the rural focus groups discussed having to pay to have the respondent served with the order (\$10 to \$20), even though there was no guarantee the order would be served. Furthermore, if the order was not served for some reason (e.g., the respondent could not be located) and the EPO had to be reissued, there would be an additional charge. Urban women did not mention this barrier.

*Fear of perpetrator retaliation.* Both rural and urban focus group participants indicated that fear of perpetrator retaliation may keep women from reporting partner violence. Participants agreed that women are afraid their husbands or boyfriends might come after them, kill them, or hurt their children. The fear of having to return to the abusive partner sometimes prevents women from reporting current abuse. If a woman has no hope of leaving the situation, she will be very careful not to do anything to aggravate her partner.

*Embarrassment.* Urban and rural women recognized that blame, stigma, and embarrassment were important barriers for women with victimization experiences. Rural participants indicated that the fear of causing a big family ruckus and the shame that criminal justice involvement would bring to the family prevent women from reporting.

*Lack of confidentiality.* Confidentiality was perceived by focus group participants as an important barrier for rural women using the criminal justice system. The idea that most people know one another in small towns and the fact that arrests, charges, and protective orders are all listed in the local newspaper contribute to rural women's perceptions that everyone will know about the violence.

*Politics.* Women from the rural focus groups believed that obtaining access to and action from the criminal justice system largely depended on one's social and political connections and socioeconomic status. The majority of focus group participants agreed that a person has to know someone in law enforcement to be taken seriously by the criminal justice system in these areas. Participants recounted multiple incidents of violent crimes, particularly incidents of sexual assault and partner violence, with few or no consequences for the perpetrator as evidence of the political bias of the criminal justice system in their community.

Another aspect of the political barriers mentioned in the rural areas was related to the association of the criminal justice system and drug crime. There were two different and conflicting explanations for how the criminal justice system and drug crime served as barriers to criminal justice services for women. Recently, in eastern Kentucky, drug crimes have received local and national attention (*Lexington Herald Leader*, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d, 2003e; *New York Times*, 2001, 2002). Thus, one explanation was that the criminal justice system was too preoccupied or overloaded with drug crimes to worry about violence against women. The other explanation for the perception of focus group participants that violence against women is a low priority for the criminal justice system was that the local governments and criminal justice systems are tied to the drug crime and are corrupt. If the perpetrator had any political connections in the criminal justice system, the victim would not be protected.

*Attitudes and gender role stereotypes.* Rural and urban focus group women mentioned the gendered nature of law enforcement as a barrier. Law enforcement was perceived as being generally negative toward women and unsympathetic toward their issues. This perception is supported by reports of women being talked down to by judges and women being blamed for the violence directly. One rural participant indicated that even obtaining legal representation was difficult because male attorneys were hesitant to enter into a conflict with other men. One participant stated, "It's a fraternity, the good ol' boys. Men don't want to go up against another man." These perceived negative attitudes toward women along with the perceptions of political corruption

both contributed to perceptions that violence against women was a low priority for the criminal justice system.

#### **Rural and Urban Differences in Protective Order Outcomes—Interviews**

*Demographics.* The data examining protective order outcomes were collected from a study of 450 rural ( $n = 200$ ) and urban ( $n = 250$ ) women who had protective orders. The mean age for women in the study was 32.3 years old. Of rural women, 98% were White, and 0% of the rural participants were African American; of urban participants, 69% were White and 27% were African American ( $\chi^2[6] = 72.7, p < .001$ ). The women in the rural areas reported more children (2.15 compared to 1.86) on average than urban women ( $F[1, 448] = 5.23, p < .05$ ). About half of both groups of women (51% of urban and 49% of rural) had minor children in common with the abusive partner. Of the rural participants, 67% reported an annual income below \$14,999 compared to 48% of the urban women ( $\chi^2[1] = 16.4, p < .001$ ). Also, 38% of the rural women reported having less than a high school education compared to 21% of the urban women ( $\chi^2[8] = 21.8, p < .01$ ). Fewer rural women were employed full time (26% compared to 42%) or part time (4% compared to 13%) than urban women ( $\chi^2[4] = 39.5, p < .001$ ).

*History of violence with an abusive partner.* As Table 3 shows, more women in the rural area were married to the abusive partner ( $\chi^2[1] = 25.9, p < .001$ ), although more women in the urban area cohabited with their abusive partner ( $\chi^2[1] = 45.8, p < .001$ ). Rural women reported they had been with their abusive partner 10 years on average, compared to 5 years for urban women ( $F[1, 448] = 57.9, p < .001$ ).

When general categories of violence were examined, there were minimal differences between urban and rural women. Almost all of the women interviewed reported psychological abuse by the abusive partner, 96% reported physical violence, 24% reported being forced or coerced to participate in sexual acts, and 76% reported physical injuries from the violence or visiting a health care facility because of intimate partner violence at some point in the relationship.

**TABLE 3**  
**History of Violence With DV Partner**

	<i>Rural (n = 200)</i>	<i>Urban (n = 250)</i>
Current relationship to DV partner		
% married to DV partner	58.0	34.0***
% cohabited with DV partner	26.5	58.4***
Relationship with DV partner		
Average # of years involved in relationship	9.93	5.00***
Overall abuse by DV partner		
% psychological abuse	99.5	100
% physical violence (with or without weapon)	95.5	97.2
% sexual assault	27.0	21.6
% any injuries or doctor visits	74.0	71.2
Mention of drug or alcohol use by perpetrator		
% before or during incidents	75.5	78.4

NOTE: DV = domestic violence.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

However, when specific types of violence were examined, there were several differences. For example, more rural women than urban women reported that their partners denied them access to money, stopped them from seeing friends or family, interfered in relationships with others, kept them from doing things for themselves, did something to spite them, threatened or actually harmed their pets, threatened to harm their children, stalked them, threatened to kill them, or threatened them with a weapon (see Table 4).

Also, more rural women than urban women reported physical abuse from their partner, such as trying to run them down with the car, driving dangerously with them in the car, threatening to hit or throw something at them, or actually throwing something at them. There were also subtle differences with regard to sexual abuse with more rural women than urban women indicating their partners accused them of being a lousy lover, insisted on having sex when they did not want to, and forcing them to do sexual things other than sexual intercourse. In addition, more rural women than urban women reported broken bones and the need to seek medical care from the violence (see Table 4).

*EPO incident.* During the interview, women were asked to describe the incident that led them to file an EPO (see Table 5).

**TABLE 4**  
**Specific Abuse by DV Partner**

	% Rural (n = 200)	% Urban (n = 250)	$\chi^2$
Psychological abuse			
Deny her access to money	38.5	25.2**	$\chi^2(1) = 9.2$
Stop her from seeing friends or family	63.0	45.2***	$\chi^2(1) = 14.2$
Interfere in relationships with others	56.0	43.6**	$\chi^2(1) = 6.2$
Keep her from doing things to help herself	55.5	40.8**	$\chi^2(1) = 9.6$
Do something to spite her	72.0	56.0**	$\chi^2(1) = 12.6$
Threatened or actually harmed pets	36.0	19.6**	$\chi^2(1) = 15.2$
Threatened to harm children	23.5	13.6**	$\chi^2(1) = 7.4$
Stalked her	61.0	50.4*	$\chi^2(1) = 5.1$
Threaten to kill her	80.5	61.2***	$\chi^2(1) = 19.6$
Threaten her with a knife or gun	61.5	41.2***	$\chi^2(1) = 18.3$
Physical abuse			
Try to run her down with car	24.5	8.0***	$\chi^2(1) = 23.3$
Drive dangerously with her in car	61.0	41.6***	$\chi^2(1) = 16.7$
Threaten to hit or throw something at her	83.0	68.4***	$\chi^2(1) = 12.6$
Actually threw something at her	65.3	50.4**	$\chi^2(1) = 10.1$
Sexual abuse			
Accuse her of being a lousy lover	34.0	21.2**	$\chi^2(1) = 9.3$
Insist on sex	54.5	38.8**	$\chi^2(1) = 11$
Force sexual things	13.0	5.2**	$\chi^2(1) = 8.5$
Consequences of abuse			
Broke a bone	17.6	9.2**	$\chi^2(1) = 6.9$
Need to seek medical treatment	39.5	27.6**	$\chi^2(1) = 7.1$

NOTE: DV = domestic violence.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

This question was open-ended. Overall, 80% of women from both areas mentioned psychological abuse, 57% mentioned physical violence, 3% mentioned being stalked, less than 1% mentioned sexual assault, and 9% mentioned a physical injury or seeking medical treatment in the incident that led to filing a protective order. Approximately 22% of women participants mentioned that their partner was using alcohol or drugs during the incident that led to filing the protective order. More rural women mentioned that the children witnessed the incident leading to the EPO ( $\chi^2[1] = 4.2, p < .05$ ), although more urban women mentioned physical violence during the EPO incident ( $\chi^2[1] = 16.7, p < .001$ ).

*DVO process and stipulations.* There were several significant differences between the two areas in the DVO process and stipulations granted that were recorded during the face-to-face

**TABLE 5**  
**EPO Incident**

	% Rural (n = 200)	% Urban (n = 250)
Violence by DVO partner		
Psychological abuse	81.55	79.6
Physical violence (with or without object)	46.0	65.2***
Stalking	2.5	2.8
Sexual assault	0.5	0.4
Mention of physical injury or participant seeking medical treatment	9.5	8.4
Drug & alcohol use		
Mention of offender drug or alcohol use	25.5	20.0
Children		
Children witnessed the incident	17.5	10.8*
Children used in the incident (e.g., threatened, kidnapped)	14.0	8.8

NOTE: EPO = Emergency Protective Order; DVO = Domestic Violence Order.  
\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

interviews (see Table 6). More rural women than urban women had no contact protective orders. Also, more rural women had the following stipulations as part of their order: footage restrictions, respondent having to vacate, custody arrangements, temporary support granted, and counseling ordered for the respondent and the petitioner. In contrast, more urban women (98%) than rural women (85%) reported the stipulation restraining their partner from disposing of and damaging property. There were also significant differences in the perceived effectiveness of the DVO across the two areas with more urban women than rural women reporting they felt the order was effective.

*Violations.* Overall, there was an average of 40 days between the issuance of the protective order and the interview (see Table 6). Within that timeframe, approximately 29% of women reported that their partner had violated the DVO. More specifically, 26% of women reported that the verbal abuse continued after receiving a protective order, 10% reported their partner threatened to kill them, 7% experienced severe violence, 3% were threatened with a weapon, 16% were stalked, and 1% experienced sexual assault even after receiving a court order as protection. Although more urban women than rural women reported verbal abuse after the protective order was issued, rural women reported their partners

**TABLE 6**  
**DVO Process and Stipulations**

	<i>Rural (n = 200)</i>	<i>Urban (n = 250)</i>	<i>Statistic</i>
Forms of relief			
No contact	90.0	62.0***	$\chi^2(1) = 45.6$
Footage restriction	85.5	15.6***	$\chi^2(1) = 218.1$
Restrained from disposing and damaging property	84.5	97.6***	$\chi^2(1) = 25.3$
Respondent to vacate	26.0	16.1**	$\chi^2(1) = 6.8$
Temporary custody granted <sup>a</sup>	49.5	26.9**	$\chi^2(1) = 17.4$
To petitioner	98.1	100.0	
To respondent	1.9	0.0	
Temporary support	13.5	3.7	$\chi^2(1) = 9.6$
Respondent to participate in counseling	40.0	16.0***	$\chi^2(1) = 32.7$
Petitioner to participate in counseling	29.1	0.8***	$\chi^2(1) = 76.9$
Effectiveness of domestic violence order*			$\chi^2(2) = 8.1$
Not at all or not very	29.6	21.3	
Fairly or extremely	43.4	57.1	
Unsure	27.0	21.7	
Violations			
Reporting DV partner violated the order	29.5	28.0	$\chi^2(1) = .12$
Average number of times DV partner has been arrested for violating	1.05	0.74	$F(1, 148) = 1.39$
Average number of times DV partner has violated	4.19	1.41*	$F(1, 448) = 5.9$
Specific violations			
Verbal abuse	20.0	31.6**	$\chi^2(1) = 7.7$
Threatened to kill	11.5	8.4	$\chi^2(1) = 1.2$
Any physical violence	8.5	14.4	$\chi^2(1) = 3.7$
Severe violence	4.5	8.4	$\chi^2(1) = 2.7$
Weapon involvement	4.0	2.0	$\chi^2(1) = 1.6$
Stalking	18.6	14.0	$\chi^2(1) = 1.7$
Sexual assault	0.5	1.2	$\chi^2(1) = .61$

NOTE: DVO = Domestic Violence Order; DV = domestic violence.

a. Of those women with minor children in common with DV partner.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

had violated the protective order an average of 4.19 times, although the urban women reported approximately 1.41 violations.

## DISCUSSION

Public policies have created legal remedies for victims of domestic violence through the use of protective orders. These

orders have the goal of providing relief from exposure to offenders as well as reducing the violent actions of offenders (Dugan, 2003). Some studies show that receiving a protective order stops the violence for the majority of women (Carlson et al., 1999; Holt et al., 2002) and that after receiving the order, women reported their lives improved, they felt better about themselves, and they felt safer (Keilitz et al., 1997). However, if the efficacy of protective orders depends on consistent implementation and definitive enforcement, then differences in how communities implement and enforce protective orders may result in significant differences in the actual protection that victims experience. This study is one of the first to examine differences between rural and urban contexts regarding the protective order process, barriers, and outcomes.

There were vast differences between rural and urban areas when the process of protective orders was examined. More specifically, results suggested that (a) nonservice rates were much higher in rural areas; (b) rural women were charged for the orders to be served; (c) fewer cases were adjudicated during the time period of study in the rural areas, possibly suggesting women must come to court more often to obtain an order; (d) a greater proportion of cases were classified into the preadjudication category in the rural areas; and (e) there was a greater amount of leg work to obtain a protective order on the part of the victim in the rural areas.

A protective order cannot be enforced unless the respondent is served with the order. Some counties in Kentucky have nonservice rates as high as 91%. Even within the counties targeted for this study, two of the rural counties had less than half of the orders served (55% and 65% nonservice rates). Other studies have found the nonservice rates to be problematic as well (Harrell, Smith & Newmark, 1993). In addition, not only did community women and public service key informants in the rural area discuss nonservice rates as an important barrier, the costs associated with the orders were also mentioned as a barrier. State law mandates there should be no costs for protective orders to ensure access to this safety mechanism for all women (KRS 403, 1992), a change likely influenced by federal regulations prohibiting states from receiving Violence Against Women Funds if fees are imposed for protective orders (Eigenberg et al., 2003). Regardless, some women in the rural areas are being charged to have their orders



served. The combination of a service fee, doubts about whether the order will even be served, doubts about the eventual effectiveness of the order, and fear may constitute important barriers. In addition, in the rural areas women were often expected to hand-deliver orders to judges for them to be signed and to enable service. In contrast, the urban area court personnel and Sheriffs' office staff perform these official tasks. Also, advocates were unavailable in most of the rural areas to explain programs and procedures when filing for the order and during the court hearing, whereas they were readily available in the urban area.

These procedural differences may seem small; however, they may make a big difference to petitioners. Filing for a protective order requires courage, motivation, and perseverance on the part of the petitioner. Research suggests that in the past 15 years, mandatory support for victims filing for a protective order has actually decreased (Eigenberg et al., 2003), leaving the majority of petitioners on their own to navigate through the legal system. If there are too many barriers or complications to filing, potential applicants may be discouraged from initiating or following through with the protective order process. In fact, one study found that perceptions of the effectiveness of protective orders was dependent on the accessibility of the court system and support services (Keilitz et al., 1997).

When barriers were examined, it is clear that failing to meet the statutory requirement was perceived as an important barrier to obtaining a protective order for women seeking safety. This barrier is mentioned throughout the literature as a factor in other jurisdictions as well (Gist et al., 2001). If a woman does not meet the legal criteria for a petitioner, it makes perfect sense that she would not receive a protective order. However, there are questions remaining about this particular barrier. It is unclear to what extent this barrier is applied accurately and consistently across all jurisdictions. The data reported here cannot speak to this particular issue, but future research examining the process and effectiveness of protective orders should consider this issue. A closer examination of women who were denied protective orders for statutory reasons is needed to analyze petitions for congruence of information and correspondence with the law. For example, in this state, women who are only dating (not cohabitating with) an abusive partner are not eligible to obtain a protective order.

However, different judges may interpret cohabitation differently. One judge may use a criterion of receiving mail at the shared residence, whereas another judge may only require spending the night at the residence at least one time during the relationship. These kinds of issues and details need to be examined because they have evaluative and practical implications.

Beyond the statutory problems, there were several other common barriers mentioned in both the rural and urban areas, including fear of the perpetrator, the lack of resources to leave an abusive relationship, and the general lack of knowledge about protective orders as well as misunderstandings about protective orders. Given that most women seeking protective orders experience high levels of abuse, fear of a perpetrator can be an important barrier (DeMaris & Swinford, 1996). Zoellner et al. (2000) found that although women whose partners threatened to kill them were more likely to complete the protective order process than those who had not received a death threat, women whose partners made threats to their children were less likely to obtain the protective order. In general, there is very little information about women who need a protective order but never even attempt to obtain one. It is important that future research examine these women to see what barriers are most salient for this group of women and to see what role fear plays.

Interestingly, women in the focus groups mentioned stories reported by the media about women who had protective orders and had used the police on multiple occasions but still ended up dead. In some cases, the protective order does not stop the violence immediately or may even contribute to increased violence (Baker, 1997; Carlson et al., 1999; Harrell & Smith, 1996; Keilitz et al., 1997; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). However, these findings suggest it is important to inform women that in many cases violence does decrease when protective orders are obtained (Carlson et al., 1999; Harrell & Smith, 1996; Keilitz et al., 1997). This could be accomplished through a large media education campaign as well as through the media portraying some positive stories of women who used protective orders and obtained safety to counter negative cases portrayed in the media.

Furthermore, the lack of resources to leave a relationship is an important barrier as well. One study comparing women who had court or police contact for intimate partner violence who did and

did not have protective orders found that those who obtained protective orders were more likely to have been employed and to have had health insurance than women who did not obtain protective orders (Wolf, Hold, Kernic & Rivera, 2000). There are two main issues to consider in understanding how the lack of resources may be a barrier to obtaining a protective order. First, the lack of knowledge about protective orders in general may be a barrier. For example, it is not clear that women understand that there are two types of orders: no violent contact and no contact. Many women live with a no violent contact order and still maintain relationships with their partners. The hope in some cases is that the couple may work through these problems, which may be very possible in some situations. A second issue to consider regarding the lack of knowledge has to do specifically with legal options. Van Hightower and Gorton (2002) found that the rural women in their study indicated that lack of knowledge about the legal options and status of their cases was problematic. In fact, these authors found that many criminal justice officials did not view the distribution of information about legal options and the status of the cases as a high priority. Future research is needed to better understand what aspects of the lack of knowledge are most salient for abused women in order to develop the most effective media and education campaigns.

An important component to overcoming the lack of resources entails society reaching out to women experiencing abuse to help them be able to leave violent relationships. Only providing legal protection to someone who has limited living alternatives is not a useful strategy. Resources must be developed to support women in leaving these relationships, especially in communities with limited jobs, housing, and daycare options such as those targeted for this study in rural areas (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2000). In addition, it is important that referral resources be kept up to date and be provided to women to facilitate their transition out of a violent relationship. Referral resources could be distributed by health and mental health providers as well as through victim services staff.

This study also found that some women thought that obtaining a protective order would make no difference in their safety because they perceived there was a lack of enforcement or punishment of the perpetrator and the opinion that violence against

women was a low priority. The enforcement of protective orders is crucial for women's safety and protection (Finn, 1991; Keilitz et al., 1997). Police have been criticized for lack of arrests in intimate partner violence situations because many officers are reluctant to arrest domestic violence perpetrators in general or because they perceive there is a lack of evidence (Jasinski, 2003; Wolf, Ly, Hobart, & Kernic, 2003). VanHightower and Gorton (2002) also found that police officers sometimes felt uncertain about whether probable cause criteria had been satisfied sufficiently to warrant an arrest in domestic violence cases and frequently doubted the credibility of domestic violence victims. The lack of enforcement of protective orders is especially important given research findings suggesting that many men who have protective orders against them often have a prior history of involvement in the criminal justice system (Klein, 1996; Keilitz et al., 1997). Finn (1991) summarized the issues:

Enforcement is the Achilles' heel of the civil protection order process because an order without enforcement at best offers scant protection and at worst decreases the victim's safety. Batterers may routinely violate orders if they believe there is no real risk of being arrested. Enforcement can break down if the courts do not monitor compliance, if victims do not report violations, and, most of all, if police, prosecutors, and judges do not respond sternly to violations that are reported. (pp. 187-188)

Legislation on enforcement has made strides in recent years with the implementation of authorizing warrantless arrests in cases where protective orders are violated and more severe penalties for repeated violations (Eigenberg et al., 2003).

Enforcement of the order was an especially salient issue for rural women as more key informants in the rural areas indicated that fear was an important reason women sought protective orders (more than 50%). Yet, rural key informants also reported that criminal justice system personnel attitudes were barriers to enforcing these orders. Women in the rural focus groups also suggested that enforcement of orders was a barrier and suggested several reasons for this perception, including political corruption in the criminal justice system. Rural women felt that crimes against women were a low priority because of the preoccupation of most criminal justice personnel with drug crimes or that

individuals who are involved in illicit drug activities had political pull in the area, implying that the criminal justice system was somehow tied into these activities. Other research suggests that political corruption in rural areas is prevalent because of the lack of adequate economic resources (Potter, Gaines, & Holbrook, 1990). These embedded political issues may have a severe impact on women trying to receive protection.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study's results. Consistent with other research, the data found that more than 90% of both rural and urban groups of women experienced physical and psychological abuse and more than one fifth experienced sexual assault during their relationships with their partner (Carlson et al., 1999; Gondolf et al., 1994; Harrell & Smith, 1996; Keilitz et al., 1997; Klein, 1996; Ptacek, 1999; Zoellner et al., 2000). Also, consistent with other research (Jaffe, Lemon, & Poisson, 2003; O'Sullivan, 2000; Ptacek, 1999), one in five provider key informants in this study believed that women use protective orders for retaliation, punishment, or other manipulative ends such as achieving advantage in custody disputes. Thus, this study found some disconnection between women's self-reported victimization and key informants' beliefs about the validity of victims' reports. Because key informants were personnel likely to influence system responses to victims, this disagreement about the reality of the violence could be a major barrier.

In addition, it is important to note that although rates of victimization seem similar across the rural and urban areas when general categories were used, there were differences in specific victimization tactics experienced by rural and urban women. Rural women were more likely to experience stalking victimization, a partner isolating her from family and friends, and limiting her access to money. Also, rural women reported experiencing more violence toward pets and children as well as more threats on her life and threats with weapons. More rural women reported a partner trying to run her down with a car or driving dangerously with her in the car. More rural women reported threats to hit her or actually hitting her with an object, and there were subtle differences in sexual abuse compared to urban women. More rural women than urban women also reported broken bones and the need for medical care because of the violence. There were not only

differences in the history of violence, but also some important differences in violence that were noted in the EPO incident.

The differences in types of violence may be related to a variety of factors. First, rural women were more likely than urban women to have been married to their partner. This may suggest that marriage is a risk factor for violence, although this finding is contrary to other research. For example, some literature suggests that cohabitators have higher rates of substance abuse (Horwitz & White, 1998) and more frequent and severe partner violence rates (Brownridge & Halli, 2002; Jackson, 1996; Stets, 1991; Stets & Straus, 1989). In fact, Brownridge and Halli (2001) found that women who cohabit or have histories of cohabiting experience more partner violence than married women who have never cohabited. The literature is not clear about how risk factors differ for women who cohabit and women who are married. In this study, marital status was confounded with length of time in the relationship and age of initiation of the violent relationship. In other words, rural women were more likely to have been married to their partners but also had been in a relationship with their partners almost twice as long as urban women. Also, the rural women began their relationship with their violent partners at much younger ages.

The differences between rural and urban women's experiences of violence may also be related to cultural differences among rural and urban environments. The literature suggests that rural areas are more isolated and may have more traditional gender role stereotypes, which may contribute to violent partners using controlling behaviors and to women having less opportunity for assistance (Websdale, 1995; Goeckermann et al., 1994). In general, the results of this study suggest that rural communities had more barriers to obtaining and serving protective orders, indicating the community was not as supportive of women who have experienced violence in contrast with the experience of women living in the urban community. Other research has found that gender role stereotypes in rural areas are associated with more blame toward the victim for her circumstances, less punishment for the male abusive partners, and a generally more unreceptive attitude toward helping female victims of intimate partner violence (Van Hightower & Gorton, 2002).

Moreover, previous research has shown that the efficacy of protective orders has been linked to the specificity and comprehensiveness of the order (Keilitz et al., 1997). Women in the rural areas consistently reported getting more stringent, comprehensive orders when compared with the urban women. Rural women more frequently cited obtaining orders of no contact, footage restrictions (keeping a distance away from the petitioner), respondent having to vacate the residence, custody arranged per the judge, temporary support ordered, and counseling ordered for the respondent and the petitioner. The only stipulation cited more frequently by the urban women was restricting the respondent from disposing of or damaging property. These data suggest that rural women obtain stricter, more comprehensive orders with more stipulations to abide by. However, these data are not consistent with previous research showing that the majority of petitioners do not receive all these stipulations as part of their orders (Gondolf et al., 1994).

In this case, it is possible that the rural areas may simply be taking a step in a positive direction by issuing orders with multiple stipulations. On the other hand, judges from both the urban and rural areas may be exacting a one-size-fits-all model rather than examining the individual specifics of the case and the needs of the women. It is clear, however, from the study results that women from the rural areas reported more frequent violations of protective orders regardless of the fact that they received stricter, more comprehensive protective orders. In fact, women in the rural areas report almost three times the number of violations reported in the urban area. Consistent with these findings, more rural women than urban women reported they did not believe the protective order had been effective.

In addition, it is not clear to what extent women are requesting stipulations and actually receiving their requested stipulations. One study found that although the majority of women seeking protective orders did receive one (76%), many were not granted the specific stipulations they requested—for example, 21% of the women asking that the respondent be excluded from the residence were denied this relief (Gondolf et al., 1994). In the present study, less than one third of the rural (27%) and less than one half of the urban (49.5%) women with children in common with the offending partner had stipulations in the protective order about

custody. Without clear guidelines regarding custody and visitation, there is a potential for increased violence and safety risks for both the women and children involved in these cases. Also, many cases included a stipulation ordering counseling for both the respondent and the petitioner. However, it was not clear how the counseling stipulation was followed up or whether there were counseling programs available to accommodate this population, especially in the rural areas, and how effective the counseling was for these men and women.

Several limitations with the current study must be mentioned. The results of this study were gathered from three rural counties and one urban county in one state. Therefore, these findings may be limited in their generalizability to other rural and urban populations. Another limitation of this study involves the lack of information about women who filed for protective orders but were unable to obtain orders. The perspective provided from this group of women would be very beneficial and useful in examining the protective order process. Also, there is a need to examine women who did not attempt to obtain protective orders but are in need of one. Even within the limitations, this study extends current knowledge about protective orders in general by addressing the process and barriers to obtaining protective orders within the context of two types of environments, rural and urban.

In summary, this study builds on research findings about the problems with the implementation of protective orders (Dugan, 2003; Finn, 1991). Results across all of these perspectives have several implications. First, although state statutes suggest that the protective order process should be fair, consistent, and accessible to all women in the state, study results suggest there are very important differences across jurisdictions. Second, there are barriers to obtaining and enforcing protective orders that are common across women from both the rural and urban areas. However, the rural areas appear to have more barriers to obtaining and enforcing protective orders than do urban areas. Third, women seeking protective orders report extensive violence histories, but victimization experiences do differ for rural and urban women. And, last, there are differences in protective order stipulations, violations, and perceived effectiveness of protective orders among rural and urban women.

The most important implication from this study would appear to be the need for a more coordinated training for criminal justice



and law enforcement personnel to improve the consistency and responsiveness of protective order processes for women who are victimized. Laws by themselves cannot effect protection. The enforcement and effectiveness require community-wide endorsement and planning (Finn, 1991). In addition, it is essential that communities develop interventions that are uniquely tailored to the cultural characteristics of the specific community although still adhering to the universal intent of the law. Communities have important differences, but fairness and fundamental protections of safety interests are an essential part of the American constitutional framework (Rawls, 1999a, 1999b). Community differences should not extend to variation in the basic fairness and level of protection offered to citizens.

More research is needed comparing the protective order process for rural and urban women in the future using multiple data perspectives for more robust and relevant conclusions. Many questions remain regarding the protective order process, barriers, and outcomes that need future research attention. For example, there are many unanswered questions about women who are denied or do not follow through on protective orders. Some research has shown that there are inherent differences in women who actually go through the process of filing for a protective order (Wolf et al., 2000) although other research, such as this study, suggests there are systemic barriers that must be addressed to provide access to all women in need of protection.

## REFERENCES

- Bachman, R. (1994). *Violence against women: A national crime victimization survey report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Bachman, R., & Saltzman, L. (1995). *Violence against women: Estimates from the redesigned survey* (NCJ-154348). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Baker, P. (1997). And I went back: Battered women's negotiation of choice. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 26, 55-74.
- Beale, C., & Johnson, K. (1995). Nonmetropolitan population continues post-1990 rebound. *Rural Conditions and Trends*, 6, 2.
- Booth, B., Ross, R., & Rost, K. (1999). Rural and urban problem drinkers in six southern states. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 34, 471-493.
- Brownridge, D., & Halli, S. (2001). *Explaining violence against women in Canada*. Lanham, MA: Lexington.

- Brownridge, D., & Halli, S. (2002). Understanding male partner violence against cohabitating and married women: An empirical investigation with a synthesized model. *Journal of Family Violence, 17*, 341-361.
- Butler M., & Beale, C. (1994). *Rural-urban continuum codes for metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties, 1993*. Washington, DC: Agriculture and Rural Economy Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- Carlson, M., Harris, S., & Holden, G. (1999). Protective orders and domestic violence: Risk factors for re-abuse. *Journal of Family Violence, 14*, 205-226.
- DeMaris, A., & Swinford, S. (1996). Female victims of spousal violence: Factors influencing their level of fearfulness. *Family Relations, 45*, 98-106.
- Doyle, R. (1998). Where the doctors aren't. *Scientific American, 279*, 31.
- Dugan, L. (2003). Domestic violence legislation: Exploring its impact on the likelihood of domestic violence, police involvement, and arrest. *Criminology and Public Policy, 2*, 283-309.
- Economic Research Service (ERS). (2003). *Measuring rurality: Urban influence codes*. Retrieved October 17, 2003, from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/rurality/UrbanInf>
- Eigenberg, H., McGuffee, K., Berry, P., & Hall, W. H. (2003). Protective order legislation: Trends in state statutes. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 31*, 411-422.
- Finn, P. (1989). Statutory authority in the use and enforcement of civil protection orders against domestic abuse. *Family Law Quarterly, 23*, 43-73.
- Finn, P. (1991). Civil protection orders: A flawed opportunity for intervention. In M. Steinman (Ed.), *Woman battering: Policy responses* (pp. 155-189). Cincinnati, OH: Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences and Anderson.
- Fishwick, N. (1998). Issues in providing care for rural battered women. In J. Campbell (Ed), *Empowering survivors of abuse* (pp. 280-290). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Geissinger, C., Lazzari, M., Porter, M., & Tungate, S. (1993). Rural women and isolation: Pathways to reconnection. *Journal of Women and Social Work, 8*, 277-299.
- Gesler, W., & Ricketts, T. (1992). *Health in rural North America: The geography of health care services and delivery*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Gist, J., McFarlane, J., Malecha, A., Fredland, N., Schultz, P., & Willson, P. (2001). Women in danger: Intimate partner violence experienced by women who qualify and do not qualify for a protective order. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 19*, 637-647.
- Goeckermann, C., Hamberger, K., & Barber, K. (1994). Issues of domestic violence unique to rural areas. *Wisconsin Medical Journal, 93*, 473-479.
- Gondolf, E., McWilliams, J., Hart, B., & Stuehling, J. (1994). Court response to petitions for civil protection orders. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 9*, 503-517.
- Harrell, A., & Smith, B. (1996). Effects of restraining orders on domestic violence victims. In E. Buzawa & C. Buzawa (Eds.), *Do arrests and restraining orders work?* (pp. 214-242). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Harrell, A., Smith, B., & Newmark, L. (1993). *Court processing and the effects of restraining orders for domestic violence victims*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Holt, V., Kernic, M., Lumley, T., Wolf, M., & Rivara, F. (2002). Civil protection orders and risk of subsequent police-reported violence. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 288*, 589-594.
- Horwitz, A., & White, H. (1998). The relationship of cohabitating and mental health. *Journal of Marriage & the Family, 60*, 505-516.
- Ivy Fiene, J. (1995). Battered women: Keeping the secret. *Journal of Women and Social Work, 10*, 179-193.
- Jackson, N. (1996). Observational experiences of intraspousal conflict and teenage victimization: A comparative study among spouses and cohabitators. *Journal of Family Violence, 11*, 191-203.

- Jaffe, P., Lemon, N., & Poisson, S. (2003). *Child custody & domestic violence: A call for safety and accountability*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jasinski, J. (2003). Police involvement in incidents of physical assault: Analysis of the redesigned National Crime Victimization Survey. *Journal of Family Violence, 18*, 143-150.
- Keilitz, S., Hannaford, P., & Efke, H. (1997). *Civil protection orders: The benefits and limitations for victims of domestic violence* (Publication No. R-201). Williamsburg, VA: National Center for State Courts.
- Kentucky Revised Statutes (KRS). (1992). *Domestic violence and abuse act*. §§ 403-715-785, 1992. Retrieved May 20, 2003, from <http://www.lrc.state.ky.us/KRS/403-00/CHAPTER.HTM>
- Kershner, M., Long, D., & Anderson, J. (1998). Abuse against women in rural Minnesota. *Public Health Nursing, 15*, 422-431.
- Klein, A. (1996). Re-abuse in a population of court restrained male batterers: Why restraining orders don't work. In E. Buzawa & C. Buzawa (Eds.), *Do arrests and restraining orders work?* (pp. 192-213). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lexington Herald Leader*. (2003a, January 26). Drugs in this story. Retrieved on February 20, 2003, from [http://www.kentucky.com/mld/heraldleader/news/special\\_packages/5033812.htm](http://www.kentucky.com/mld/heraldleader/news/special_packages/5033812.htm)
- Lexington Herald Leader*. (2003b, January 19). Drug overdose numbs Appalachia. Retrieved on February 20, 2003, from [http://www.kentucky.com/mld/heraldleader/news/special\\_packages/4982326.htm](http://www.kentucky.com/mld/heraldleader/news/special_packages/4982326.htm).
- Lexington Herald Leader*. (2003c, January 19). Agency OKs more pills in chase. Retrieved on February 20, 2003, from [http://www.kentucky.com/mld/heraldleader/news/special\\_packages/4982321.htm](http://www.kentucky.com/mld/heraldleader/news/special_packages/4982321.htm)
- Lexington Herald Leader*. (2003d, January 19). Lesser-known favorites cheap, abundant. Retrieved on February 20, 2003, from [http://www.kentucky.com/mld/heraldleader/news/special\\_packages/4982335.htm](http://www.kentucky.com/mld/heraldleader/news/special_packages/4982335.htm)
- Lexington Herald Leader*. (2003e, January 26). Addicted and corrupted. Retrieved on February 20, 2003, from [http://www.kentucky.com/mld/heraldleader/news/special\\_packages/5033813.htm](http://www.kentucky.com/mld/heraldleader/news/special_packages/5033813.htm)
- Logan, T., Stevenson, E., Evans, L., & Leukefeld, C. (2004). Rural and urban women's perceptions of barriers to health, mental health, & criminal justice services: Implications for victims services. *Violence and Victims, 19*, 37-62.
- New York Times*. (2001, July 29). The alchemy of oxycontin: From pain relief to drug. Retrieved February 13, 2003, from <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v01/n1369/a04.html>
- New York Times*. (2002, April 15). Oxycontin deaths said to be up sharply. Retrieved February 13, 2003, from <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v02/n732/a02.html>
- O'Sullivan, C. (2000). Estimating the population at risk for violence during child visitation. *Domestic Violence Report, 5*(5), 65-80.
- Porter, K. (1993). Poverty in rural America: A national overview. In *Sociocultural and service issues in working with rural clients* (pp. 51-63). Albany, NY: State University of New York at Albany Press.
- Potter, G., Gaines, L., & Holbrook, B. (1990). Blowing smoke: An evaluation of marijuana eradication in Kentucky. *American Journal of Police, 9*, 97-116.
- Ptacek, J. (1999). *Battered women in the courtroom: The power of judicial response*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Rawls, J. (1999a). *The law of peoples*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, J. (1999b). *A theory of justice* (Rev. ed.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Schneider, E. (2000). *Battered women and feminist lawyering*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Stets, J. (1991). Cohabiting and marital aggression: The role of social isolation. *Journal of Marriage & the Family, 53*, 669-682.

- Stets, J., & Straus, M. (1989). The marriage license as a hitting license: A comparison of assaults in dating, cohabitating, and married couples. In M. Pirog-Good & J. Stets (Eds.), *Violence in dating relationships: Emerging social issues* (pp. 33-52). New York: Praeger.
- Tice, K. (1990). A case study of battered women's shelters in Appalachia. *Journal of Women and Social Work, 5*, 83-100.
- Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (2000). *Extent, nature and consequences of intimate partner violence* (NCJ 181867). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.
- U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. (2000). Retrieved March 28, 2003, from <http://www.census.gov>
- Van Hightower, N., & Gorton, J. (2002). A case study of community-based responses to rural woman battering. *Violence Against Women, 8*, 845-872.
- Websdale, N. (1995). Rural woman abuse: The voices of Kentucky women. *Violence Against Women, 1*, 309-338.
- Websdale, N. (1998). *Rural woman battering and the justice system: An ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wolf, M., Hold, V., Kernic, M., & Rivara, F. (2000). Who gets protection orders for intimate partner violence? *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 19*, 286-291.
- Wolf, M., Ly, U., Hobart, M., & Kernic, M. (2003). Barriers to seeking police help for intimate partner violence. *Journal of Family Violence, 18*, 121-129.
- Zoellner, L., Feeny, N., Alvarez, J., Watlington, C., O'Neill, M., Zager, R., & Foa, E. (2000). Factors associated with completion of the restraining order process in female victims of partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 15*, 1081-1099.

*TK Logan, PhD, is currently an associate professor in the Department of Behavioral Science at the University of Kentucky with appointments in the Department of Psychiatry and the Center on Drug and Alcohol Research. Dr. Logan has been funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and has completed several drug court program evaluations as well as studies focused on intimate partner violence and divorce; intimate partner violence and custody outcomes; stalking victimization and perpetration; health and mental health status, barriers, and service use among women; and health, mental health, substance use, and victimization among rural and urban women.*

*Lisa Shannon has an MSW and is currently working on her PhD at the University of Kentucky. She is currently a research analyst at the Center on Drug and Alcohol Research. She works on a grant from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) studying alcohol, violence, mental health and health status and service use among rural and urban women with protective orders.*

*Robert Walker, MSW, LCSW, is assistant professor at the University of Kentucky, Department of Psychiatry and the Center on Drug and Alcohol Research. He also has conjoint appointments in the College of Social Work and the Department of Behavioral Science at the University of Kentucky. He was director of a community mental health center for 20 years and has had an active clinical practice, including forensic mental health. He is the project director of a statewide substance abuse treatment outcome study and has evaluated substance abuse projects. He has published in the areas of substance abuse, brain injury, and domestic violence.*