

Community-Led Research on the Needs of Rural Women and Girls in relation to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)



What is this research?

Rural Community Network (RCN) and Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN), are carrying out a **community-led research project** exploring how women and girls in rural Northern Ireland experience safety, support, and access to services in relation to VAWG.

The research looks at how rural life – including small communities, distance, transport, housing, digital access, and close social networks – can shape people's experiences when they are worried about safety, wellbeing, or harm.

This work forms part of the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Delivery Plan, commissioned in partnership with The Executive Office and DAERA.

Why is this research needed?

Violence against women and girls affects all communities. However, rural areas often face **distinct challenges**, including:

- Fewer and less visible services
- Concerns about privacy and being recognised
- Distance, transport, and housing pressures
- Strong community ties that can both support and silence
- Limited opportunities to seek help early, before crisis points

While policy is often designed at a regional level, **rural realities are not always well understood** or reflected. This research aims to change that by grounding evidence in lived experience and community insight.

Who are we speaking to?

We want to hear from people and organisations who are **part of everyday rural life**, including:

- Farming and agricultural groups
- Sports clubs and sporting organisations
- Faith groups and cultural organisations
- Community and voluntary groups
- Health, housing, youth, and advice services

We are also engaging directly with **rural women and girls**, including those with lived experience, in a safe and trauma-informed way.



Why your voice matters

People often turn first to **trusted local networks** – not formal services – when they are worried or unsure what to do. Groups like yours:

- See patterns others don't
- Understand local pressures and norms
- Influence attitudes, behaviours, and help-seeking
- Are often the first place people look for guidance or reassurance

Your insights can help ensure that future policy and services are **realistic, effective, and appropriate for rural communities**.

What will taking part involve?

Participation is flexible and proportionate. This may include:

- A short interview sharing your perspectives based on your experience or role, reflecting on what works well locally and what could work better
- Focus group discussion either online or in person

You do **not** need specialist knowledge of violence or safeguarding to take part.

What difference will this make?

The findings will be used to:

- Inform government policy and rural needs based policy design
- Improve access to early support and prevention
- Reduce unintended harm caused by rural invisibility or service gaps
- Strengthen collaboration between communities, services, and decision-makers

The final recommendations will be **practical, rural-sensitive, and action-focused**, with clear routes to implementation.

Confidentiality and care

All engagement is:

- Confidential and handled sensitively
- Trauma-informed and voluntary

Support and signposting will be available where needed.

Interested in taking part?

We would welcome a conversation about how your group might be involved.

Contact: samantha@ruralcommunitynetwork.org or louise@nirwn.org

Time commitment: Agreed in advance and kept manageable

Your perspective can help shape safer, stronger rural communities.

