Societal aggression and violence in rural New Zealand

A preliminary overview collated by Dr Ann Pomeroy for The Bishop's Action Foundation

(note: this preliminary exploration is designed to inspire discussion and prompt further research)

What do we know? We can access figures for: –

- Family violence (including economic and psychological abuse)
- Child abuse
- Animal abuse
- Suicide
- Crime
- Drug abuse

Theoretical perspectives (attitudes and values)

According to the website goodshepherd.org.nz contributing factors for domestic violence in New Zealand are more likely to occur when alcohol is involved, being financially reliant on a partner, social and economic disadvantage regarding education, employment, health, housing and income, in young families, and beneficiaries in sole parent households.

In rural areas add in stress from business ownership, and impact of climatic factors (includes those servicing the farm sector). For farm businesses add in stresses relating to the impact of adverse weather events (drought, floods, snow) and pest or disease outbreaks (particularly for livestock farmers).

Topic areas include:

- Gendered inequality and exploitation
- Toxic masculinity
- Racism
- Class (power differentials/socio-economic inequality and poverty)

Historical context

From a sociological and historical perspective, the literature shows that this is not a new issue, but as attitudes and values have changed behaviours once seen as acceptable are no longer so. Behaviour (family violence) that was previously condoned is now deemed illegal. For example, local GP Allan North could write complacently in the late-1940s about male forestry workers (Minginui): "Wife-beating was a favourite pastime – nearly always well deserved" (North 1971:174).

Actual physical abuse is rarely discussed in the literature, but there is clear evidence of psychological abuse and exploitation. For example, children were exploited and overworked – see for example historian Claire Toynbee (1995) and research by Hunter and Riney-Kehrberg (2002). Rosemary Goodyear noted that the children of share-milkers and poor farmers had particularly difficult lives. Unfortunately, "Perceptions of a romantic arcadia, however, blinkered authorities when confronting the more arduous experience of childhood in rural areas … [and] … The survival of the yeoman ideal … continued to depend on the use of family labour, especially among smallholders struggling with the impact of economic recession" (Goodyear 2006: 80-81). Writing of the period between 1921 and 1951, James Watson noted that even when there was a reduced demand for labour on the farm this "was almost certainly hidden, for the not unusual reason that it had been performed by women and

children. It is evident that very long hours of farmwork continued to be done by the wives, daughters and youthful sons of farmers, particularly on smaller and poorer units" (Watson 1990: 9). Women were often reluctant to speak out about their situation.

Historians such as Mary-Jean McLauchlan (1992) and Sally Parker (1988) drew attention to the prevailing attitudes. Women were imbued with the idea that "a man belonged to his land before he 'belonged' to her", and any dreams they might have were to be deferred to those of their husband (McLauchlan 1992: 6). Men inherited the land and respect for a man was in his ownership of land, whereas for rural women, respect came with children – without "children a woman's honour and power were eroded" (McLauchlan 1992: 7). Women were the 'unpaid relatives assisting' on farms. As unpaid workers, farm wives' emotional needs were often denied. New brides were often treated as outsiders and were resented by their husbands' relatives, yet they were expected to care for their in-laws. Although ignored, women were also discouraged from having any independence, and this created extreme loneliness for many. Hospitality, cooking for workers and their husband's visitors, was a taken-for-granted job of the women. It was their 'duty' to provide meals on time even when expected to also 'help out' on the farm (McLauchlan 1992).

Parker found many rural women were unable to attend secondary school as there were few or no school buses on country roads (prohibiting attendance at schools located in urban areas). "Education for daughters of farmers was placed even further out of reach by the fact that many parents viewed education for girls as a low priority" (Parker 1988: 3). Few farmers were going to 'waste money' on a daughter. For a girl to go to secondary school also required living away from home (requiring boarding fees), and anyway the expected future role of women was as wife and mother, a role reinforced by a curriculum which emphasised domestic training. After all marriage just meant exchanging a parent's sink for a husband's, going from rearing younger siblings to rearing your own, and exchanging farm work for your father, for farm work for your husband. Writing of the post WW2-era Parker noted that "Working women who had been lauded during the war years were likely to be regarded in peacetime as neurotic and maladjusted" (Parker 1988: 10-11). At the end of WW2, rural wives and mothers returned to being unpaid domestics.

Oral histories (recorded in 1997) of people who lived in a post-WW2 settlement of undeveloped pumice country in Waikite Valley, south of Rotorua (Moodie 2000), reflected the widely different perspectives of the men compared to the women. The men's memories were constructed around the New Zealand myth of the pioneer settler. Despite hardships, the 1950s were "the good old days, or the Golden Age of pioneering" (Moodie 2000: 60). From the mid-60s, however, falling prices and rising costs meant many farms were too small for a family to make a living, and while many sold-up, other families for various reasons became locked into their properties and retrenched. Despite the economic challenges, pioneering values of independence, hard work, ingenuity, and community, gave the men satisfaction in their achievements. They saw themselves adhering to the land and building a better future. While the men were leaders and actors, imposing their will on the landscape, the women's life narratives were stories of human relationships. They worked on the farm helping husbands and raising the children. While some rejected the dominant domestic ideology and were ambivalent about their success as housewives, all "found their husband's demands for help on the farm in constant conflict with the business of caring properly for homes and children" (Moodie 2000: 60). They had no control over their own lives and resented this, and this sometimes escalated into violent arguments. "All were bitter about their status as unpaid farm labourers, with no financial share in the property and no influence on decisions about farm expenditure" (Moodie 2000: 61). Some women had to account for every penny of their expenditure. A number of the women developed an alternative narrative identity

taking paid work off-farm to achieve independence (sometimes in the face of spousal opposition). Most hid the gender conflict in order to protect their marriages.

Sally Parker's (1988) Master of Philosophy in History at Waikato University recognised that the liberating potential of World War Two did not carry over into the 1950s for rural women, and that following the trauma of the war, people were unwilling to 'rock the boat' by challenging the status quo. People latched on to the idea that they were living a stable and comfortable way of life where "New Zealanders shared similar social values which led to a united and harmonious society. … social problems such as poverty and racism could not be acknowledged, much less remedied" (Parker 1988: 14). Women conformed with this scheme, settling into their 'traditional' role and maintaining silence on issues that deeply affected their lives, including women being battered and raped. Parker observed that most of the 30 Pākehā farm women she interviewed "appear to have happily accepted the rather limited role prescribed for women in the 1950s, [but] an occasional voice did question the nostalgic view of the decade" (Parker 1988: 15).

Women who had been independent and earning wages or salary prior to marriage lost their jobs and their autonomy when they married, whether in an urban or rural situation. Women had to ask their husbands for spending money (which created feelings of anger and resentment), and "the management of financial affairs was considered by most farming couples to be a male concern" (Parker 1988: 104). Few women operated their own cheque account: husbands often opposed their having this independence and the banks were reluctant to issue accounts to women. Farm women in the fifties were beset by a barrage of newspaper and magazine instructions and images of how they should behave and what image they should present (feminine, passive and dependent). Femininity was a complete contrast to the reality of their lives: bearing and rearing large families (in an era when sex and birth control was not discussed, country women did not have access to family planning clinics and doctors were frequently patronising and uncommunicative), and undertaking endless housework and (in Waikato's dairy-country) work in the milking shed. Divorce was stigmatised, and women who were abused by their husbands had no redress in an environment where, on the surface, all was happiness and prosperity (Parker 1988). The women Parker interviewed did not want their daughters to live as they had. They wanted their daughters to be able to plan the size of their families and to have opportunities they recognised they had missed. Parker commented that the daughters she interviewed had not been indulged despite being born into a relatively prosperous era. The daughters themselves "stated that they were strictly disciplined by their parents throughout the fifties … [and] few daughters accepted that beatings were appropriate punishments … 'I would have been more likely to understand why my parents were angry if they had talked to me about it. Instead, my father hitting me just made me resentful and fearful' " (Parker 1988: 153).

Fullbright scholar Jane Collier's work in Springston Canterbury identified class antagonism. Status was divided by type of farm: sheep versus dairy and small-farming. "Economic position among farmers is determined primarily by size of holding and quality of the soil" (Collier 1954: 15). Sheep farmers had the highest status (more money and not tied to the twice daily milkings). After the farmers came the business people, with those who owned their own business having higher status than those who did not. "Those who work in Christchurch or Hornby tend to have higher stats than those who work for others in the community. The headmaster and the minister, by virtue of their profession, and, therefore, their traditional position of power in the community, have status just below that of the big sheep farmer" (Collier 1954: 17). Farmer labourers had lowest status of all, with the exception of one family headed by a 'drunk' and whose wife worked as a charwoman to feed her children. Length of time in the community added prestige. Community leadership was from the large landowning class. Hired-men, while on familiar terms with their bosses, were seen as of a lower class. Women's work

was devoted to providing meals, including baking for morning and afternoon teas, sewing and laundering clothes in addition to child rearing. Men drank at local pubs or at the Addington pub in Christchurch when attending stock markets. There were film evenings at the district high school as well as movies in Christchurch, but little formal visiting. There were several sources of tension. Lower status groups felt a sense of inferiority, and that their opinions were not heard when community affairs were under discussion (Collier 1954: 26). People who lived in the county but worked elsewhere were not regarded as part of the community. Although only a few people from the township worked in the city, they were seen by most rural residents as city people.

Despite the major transformations and economic shocks occurring within rural New Zealand from the late 1960s, there is little analysis of the sociological impacts that were occurring or how these impacts were playing out within families in terms of stress, antisocial behaviour and family dynamics.

The 1980s onwards

Ethnographic research conducted between 1985 and 1987 in Eastern Southland by Rosemary Smith and Marivee McMath pointed to radical shifts in attitudes following the second wave of feminism and concomitant legislation such as the 1976 Matrimonial Property Act. These shifts enabled the women to go from being 'just homemakers' to recognising their vital contribution to the farm business. It justified their acquisition of a partnership stake and their seeking equal status in decision-making.

While women went from being 'obedient daughters/good wives and mothers' to their partners sharing the housework alongside their fully sharing in the farm business, full membership in a rural community depended on having the correct credentials. This required having the 'right' family background, social class (assessed by occupation, ethnicity and wealth), length of association with the district, group affiliation and community service (Smith and McMath 1988: 45). Which family a woman married-into was critical in determining into which social networks she would be accepted. Later reflecting on this research, Smith observed how many of her respondents had felt empowered to disclose personal experiences and feelings that they did not want recorded. "Some wished to tell me of experiences, for example of violence, which were not (or could not) be openly acknowledged in the community" (Smith 1993: 85).

When Hugh Campbell (1993) similarly reflected on his ethnographic research (Methven and Mt Somers in Canterbury), he noted that local men he interviewed were deeply imbued with the ethos of a 'rural idyll' which led them to ignore unwelcome truths about their drinking and machismo.

> *"People were dismayed by our findings because they had compartmentalised 'drinking problems' in the town to mean 'the problem we have with drunk teenagers having car crashes and killing themselves'. … Neither did they expect themselves to fail to pass muster on even the most rudimentary gender analysis. However, the most common feeling was not that our research had failed to tell the truth, but that simply they could not see the point in discussing that kind of issue at all. This material was not compatible with the rural idyll and therefore was not for public consumption"* (Campbell 1993: 92).

In an engaging analysis of rural pubs/male rural drinking as part of an exploration of the links between public leisure sites and gendered power in rural communities, Hugh Campbell (2000) commented that male pub drinking practices persisted "because they are a site of male power and legitimacy in rural community life. Further, rural pubs can actually operate as a key site where hegemonic forms of masculinity are constructed, reproduced, and successfully defended" (Campbell 2000: 563). While Campbell recognised that pubs enabled the operation of gendered power in rural communities by providing places where rural masculinities could be enacted and defended, he was initially unable to

explore whether engagement in a heavy public drinking culture impacted on gender and power relations elsewhere, including in the home. Nor was he able to explore the possibility of a relationship between pub-life/hegemonic masculinity and domestic violence. These gaps were remedied to an extent in later work when Campbell teamed up with Michael Bell and Margaret Finny to explore the significance of gender, and social relations on peoples' opportunities and well-being (Campbell *et al* 2006). "The way rural men conduct their lives has a huge impact on how rural women live their lives, for gender is a relational matter. Notions of what are appropriate actions for men are often conceived in contrast to what is deemed appropriate for women, and vice versa" (Campbell *et al* 2006: 2). Constraints on how men experience their lives in turn shape the constraints women experience, and again vice versa (Campbell *et al* 2006: 3). Drawing on his ethnographic work (five years residence in Ashburton district and Methven township doing participatory research and over 100 formal interviews) Campbell's chapter on rural masculinity in small-town New Zealand is salient for its insights into why challenging conventional notions of masculinity is so difficult. Extending his analysis beyond the pub walls Campbell found from interviewing local women and newcomers to the community, that while people were not ignorant of male power or the dominance of the men's drinking culture, they could not challenge it in any way that would be accepted as legitimate by the community (Campbell 2006: 90).

Jock Phillips (1996) historical research on the stereotypical Pakeha male provides context for parallel analyses. Phillips' exploration of gender relations and structures of discourse which shaped understanding of the masculine and expectations of male behaviour in New Zealand, as well as the links between male images and male power, provides insight into masculine aggression. Phillips noted that from the 19th century there was a shift away from a disciplinarian approach ("canes and fierce anger", Phillips 1996: 237) of the patriarch towards his wife and children. Nevertheless, there was considerable ambivalence towards family life. Men who had been working from the age of 12 and who married at around age 28 had had a good 15 or so years of relative independence ("playing sport, drinking beer and having fun with their mates" Phillips 1996: 240) during which strong habits in spending time and money evolved. With little access to, or knowledge of, contraception family men were quickly faced with having to provide economic support for expanding families. Many opted to join their mates at the pub to avoid the domestic home scene. When the feminist movement started to address women's issues, refuges were established in main centres in the 1970s for wives and partners beaten up at home. "The refuges began to document the extent of domestic violence in New Zealand, and a stereotype was born of the male who was a respectable husband in public but a violent abuser unable to control his anger at home. There had of course been negative images of male violence in New Zealand before, but such violence had been located in the exclusively male culture – in the pub, on the frontier, on the rugby field. The home had been considered the guarantee of respectability, the place where men settled down and learned to control their wilder instincts" (Phillips 1996: 274). While Phillips was not correct in assuming male violence was contained within an "exclusively male culture", certainly by the 1990s, the issue of male abuse of "the people who were closest [to them] and most vulnerable" (Phillips 1996: 274) was being discussed, at last, in public. Unfortunately, the pressure of rural and "small-town conformity remained strong and men found it difficult to escape the camaraderie of the male sub-culture" (Phillips, 1996: 275). Elaborating on this theme, Phillips considered the personal cost which the male stereotype imposed on men ("the role which they had been trained for since the cradle, and lacking other models that might have been more fulfilling" Phillips, 1976: 289). The pressure to prove manhood through alcohol resulted in physical and psychological injury to themselves and others. Phillips argued that: "Men, thinking it a weakness to express emotion, found it difficult to communicate and were locked into lonely isolation. Once their rugby days were over they were left with acquaintances, but few friends. Men's frustration at their

inability to communicate effectively poisoned their sexual relations or else found an outlet in violence" (Phillips, 1996: 289).

The role played by small-town/rural communities in compelling people to conform to proscribed behaviours has been explored elsewhere. In their analysis of the concept 'community' and how communities support or constrain feelings experienced by rural women in terms of their personal safety, Ruth Panelli, Jo Little and Anna Kraak (2004) argued that "emotional geographies may add new energy and insight into critiques of community life, social exclusion and rurality" (Panelli *et al* 2004: 447). They specifically noted that "attention to women's fear may be easily marginalised and othered especially when, in rural societies, their position is already frequently marginalised or at least secondary to the dominant masculinist and patriarchal ideas that continue to exist in many settings" (Panelli *et al* 2004: 447). Panelli *et al* noted how little research had been undertaken about crime in rural areas. Crime rates are lower than in urban places so seen as less worthy of study, but also rural areas are often conceptualised through an arcadian lens: "the idyllic construction of rural communities where crime is portrayed as antithetical to the seemingly harmonious and serene `country' way of life" (Panelli *et al* 2004: 448). 'Common sense' constructions about rural communities assume low levels of fear of crime. While sociology and geography literature normalise ideas on rural communities as safe places, other disciplines identify rural areas as frightening. Rural areas may be seen as "including significant (but frequently hidden) patterns of violence again women" (Panelli *et al* 2004: 448). The literature review conducted by these authors identified that social attributes and cultural norms operating in rural areas influence attitudes, emotions and behaviours. For example, "the cultural importance of family and the conservative and traditional beliefs adhered to by many rural Australians ensure that women experiencing violence have great difficulty reporting abuse" (quoted in Panelli *et al* 2004: 448). Rural communities are seen as close-knit, protective environments where fear of crime is lower due to the surveillance and security offered by supportive neighbours. The authors commented that "in these constructions rural communities are often assumed to be homogeneous, with residents holding the same values and belief structures, especially those pertaining to criminal activity. Strangers to these communities are therefore often seen as potential threats … [the outsider status] of new residents, urban tourists, gypsies, young people and itinerant workers often results in them being blamed for any crime that occurs" (Panelli *et al* 2004: 449). Finally, Panelli *et al* note a neglect of gender in the literature. That is, there are few accounts of women's experience, although women are seen as vulnerable "due to patriarchal structures that work to decrease women's mobility and reduce their access to services and support network … [These] studies have also resulted in an increased awareness of the hidden nature of rural domestic violence" (Panelli *et al* 2004: 449). Domestic violence is 'hidden' due to the shame the women associate with what they perceive to be in a patriarchal rural setting as their `failure' in the role of rural wife and homemaker.

<u>Contemporary - Intimate partner violence</u>

For her Kellogg's Rural Leadership study, Nadine Porter (2016) focused on the kind of support available to New Zealand's working rural women within the context of a society which still did not seem to recognise how women's lives had changed. Using an on-line survey of 109 rural women reached via Farming Mums NZ Facebook Page, Young Rural Ladies Facebook Page and Dairy Women's Network Facebook pages, as well as interviews with key informants from rural women's organisations, Porter found that rural women worked long hours off-farm, had social lives that were increasingly online, and that the communities they lived in still operated "in the historical colonial space of a 'man's world' " (Porter 2016: 3). Porter grounded her analysis within a story which dissected a photo of a 'happy family' that was hiding toxic relationships. Local expectations that rural men should adhere to rigid masculine stereotypes and that stoicism was the norm, plus a lack of support for rural families, resulted

in tragic outcomes. These included domestic violence, depression, suicide, and abuse perpetrated by 'well respected' community members. The children struggled to cope in a rural community which saw none of (or ignored) the trauma. Equally concerning, these impacts affected several generations in this family and were reflected in the contemporary stories of the women who responded to Porter's survey.

Doctoral research on poverty in rural Taranaki uncovered intimate partner violence (by a male towards a female) issues which arose from the patriarchal structure and hegemonic masculinity prevailing in the district. Lesley Pitt, Jane Maidment and Yvonne Crichton-Hill (2019) noted that while rates of violence were similar between urban and rural areas, there were aspects of intimate partner violence which were different. "Violence in rural localities can be exacerbated by geographic isolation, the presence of, and easy access to, firearms, a patriarchal culture with more defined gender roles than those found in urban areas and women being coerced to keep private what goes on within their homes … [also] Help can be difficult to access due to a lack of rural social and legal services and/or poorly funded and understaffed social services" (Pitt *et al* 2019: 32). Lack of access to transport was a particularly important issue in geographically isolated areas, as women were prevented from seeking help or escaping from abusive and life-threatening situations. Pitt *et al*'s study was based on in-depth qualitative interviews with 23 women and five men (age range 17 to 70 years), who were found for the original poverty study with the help of key informants on a confidential basis, followed by a snowballing approach (where participants recommend others, a technique often used to contact hard-to-reach people). Already marginalised by their economic position, the women in the study took for granted their position of being dominated and controlled by men both at home and at work, as that was all they knew. Nonetheless they resented male assumptions of entitlement, and how wider social and legal systems supported male power. A common theme described was "as part of intimate partner violence, hegemonic masculinity, where normalised ways of behaving for men included heavy drinking" (Pitt *et al* 2019: 34). This was part of a version of rural manhood seen as natural: "that of the *hard man*, someone who drinks heavily, works hard, does not express feelings and dominates women and children" (Pitt *et al* 2019: 35). The researchers commented that "the construct of an ideal man was shaped by the workplace and rugby. Because masculinity can be precarious, public displays of manliness, such as playing rugby union, can be used to reassert or defend manhood" (Pitt *et al* 2019: 36). This culture does not seem to have changed over the two decades since Campbell (2000) conducted his study. An important finding was how often other extended family members were unaware of the abuse and controlling behaviour being perpetrated in the home (and farm), particularly when the public face of the perpetrator appears benign resulting in family members supporting him not her. Written for a social work audience, the study emphasised the importance of social workers being aware of the nuances of gender and power, particularly in rural communities where "traditional gender roles, patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity impact on rural women and make them vulnerable to intimate partner violence" (Pitt *et al* 2019: 40).

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