

Family Violence, Firearms and Animal Abuse in Rural Communities

Forum Report

Discussing Research Findings And Promoting Action



Submitted to the Canada Firearms Centre

By

Dr. Deborah Doherty
Co-Principal Researcher
Executive Director
Public Legal Education and
Information Service of NB
deborah.doherty@gnb.ca
Phone: (506) 453-7958
Fax: (506) 462-5193

Dr. Jennie Hornosty
Co-Principal Researcher
Professor of Sociology
Department of Sociology
University of New Brunswick
hornosty@unb.ca
Phone: (506) 458-7445
Fax: (506) 453-4659

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Introduction

This report provides an overview of a “forum” that was organized by Dr Deborah Doherty and Dr Jennie Hornosty, co-principal researchers of a study entitled *Understanding the Links: Family Violence, Firearms and Animal Abuse*.¹ The Forum was held at the Fredericton Inn, Fredericton, New Brunswick, on May 26, 2008. The purpose of the forum was to promote discussion and action on the findings of the Family Violence, Firearms and Animal Abuse study. This is a groundbreaking study as it is one of very few research initiatives that examines the presence and effects of firearms in rural homes where actual or threatened violence towards women, children, property or animals are involved. The study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to identify the broader cultural context of, and risk factors for, firearms misuse in selected rural communities in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

While numerous efforts were made to disseminate the findings to the public, community groups and academic audiences on the nature and extent of firearms risks in homes experiencing family violence, the researchers felt it was also important to share these findings directly with the research partners and to encourage them to discuss and act on the recommendations. The researchers hope that the findings will be used to enhance approaches to crime prevention, firearms investigations, court sanctions, and safer communities, as well as the development of better-informed intervention policies, programs and strategies designed to foster greater safety for women and other victims in rural communities across Canada.

Purpose of the Forum

The purpose of the forum was to present the findings of the research study directly to the research partners who contributed to the success of the study in so many ways. This ranged from commenting on and sharing ideas about the proposed research

¹ Dr. Doherty and Dr. Hornosty have been conducting family violence research together for the past ten years. The research team, *Family Violence on the Farm and in Rural Communities*, is one of the original teams of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research, at the University of New Brunswick. The study of family violence and firearms was funded by the Canada Firearms Center and was conducted from 2006-2007 after which a period of dissemination and distribution of findings took place. The team conducts Participatory Action Research which listens to the voices of women and the community, and works to share these voices with anyone interested in ending violence against women.

instruments prior to their submission for research ethics approval, to administering the surveys to abused women, to arranging focus groups and finally, to recruiting women to be interviewed. The theme of the forum was “Exploring the Links: Family Violence, Firearms, and Animal Abuse in Rural Communities”. We wanted to seek our partners’ feedback on the recommendations contained in the report and to hear their suggestions on how best to move the recommendations forward, particularly in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. The specific goals of the forum were:

- To provide a vehicle to explore the findings and recommendations of the study in-depth;
- To serve as a catalyst to launch coordinated action responses including educational strategies, enhanced risk assessment tools around firearms victimization, supportive programs for rural victims, sheltering programs for pets, and legislative solutions that address the findings of the report;
- To act as a springboard for identifying regional research sites to replicate this study across Canada.

Invitations

Invitations to the forum were sent to all our research partners and to other potential stakeholders and interested parties. Invitations were also sent to individuals who indicated they would be interested in such an invitation, through a sign-up sheet provided at previous presentations. Many of those invited sent invitations to others from their departments or organizations. Participants sent an RSVP via email to register and many of the invitees who were unable to attend (see Appendix A – Invitees unable to attend) sent their regrets. Here are a couple of comments from these invitees:

I'm sorry to miss this event. It sounds very interesting. Please keep me posted on future events.

I would be very interested in this, however... I am unavailable... [I will] touch base with our IPV trainers directly to see if we can have at least some representation from FPF [Fredericton Police Force] at this important session.

Agenda

An agenda was emailed to participants prior to the forum (see Appendix B – Forum Agenda). The forum opened with a continental breakfast, followed by a PowerPoint presentation which offered an overview of the findings. The agenda was structured with the goal of giving forum participants the opportunity to meet and network prior to a presentation on the research study and to have maximum time for discussing the research findings and recommendations.

After the overview, the forum broke into two small discussion groups, with participants choosing one of the following themes: “Family Violence and Firearms” or “Family Violence and Pet/Farm Animal Abuse.” During these facilitated discussions, participants had the opportunity to explore options for enhancing the safety of rural women and to elaborate on the programs, policy or legislative actions that might be needed to bring the recommendations to fruition.

A summary of the recommendations relevant to the specific topic was provided to participants to help them structure their discussions (see Appendix C – Small Group Discussions). During the discussions participants responded to specific questions posed by the facilitators (see Appendix D – Report Back Sheets) and a note taker was identified in each group to report back on their discussions to the plenary group.

Following the lunch break, participants again broke into two small discussion groups around these themes: “Public Education and Training” and “Risk Assessment Tools”. These groups were structured in a similar fashion to the earlier discussions. The report back sessions at the end of the day enabled each group to hear what others had discussed and to share their own comments on moving forward on the recommendations. The report-back was followed by a wrap-up of the forum.

Participation at the Forum

In addition to the research partners, individuals involved in many aspects of the family violence, firearms safety and pet abuse attended the forum (see Appendix E – Participant List). Twenty-two people from across New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island attended the forum. The participants represented: transition houses, the S.P.C.A., the Fredericton Police Force, and the University of New Brunswick, as well as government officials from Social Development, Chief Firearms Office, Women’s Issue Branch, Domestic Violence Court, the NB Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Victim Services, and Outreach Services. All of these participants actively participated in the discussions and shared ideas about the recommendations, public education initiatives, the need for enhanced services for victims experiencing family violence and firearms victimization. They also discuss additional ways of disseminating the research findings to the public.

Forum Organization and Funding

The Forum was an integral component of the Family Violence, Firearms and Animal Abuse research initiative which was funded by the Canada Firearms Centre. The research included a component for dissemination and communication of the findings to participants, policy-makers, the government, community, social service providers, police, veterinarians, SPCA and others interested in the findings. To organize the forum, the researchers contracted with Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick to engage a student to assist in organizing the event and inviting the research partners and stakeholders. Travel subsidies (see Appendix G – Subsidy Application Form) were offered to those who needed assistance to attend the forum. Since many of the partners were from different areas of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, forum subsidies were available for individuals who could not otherwise attend. Meals (including the two nutrition breaks) were provided at no cost. Unfortunately, there was not sufficient funding, nor the time and resources, to include simultaneous translation at the forum. An apology was made to the stakeholders in the covering email, and an offer was made to conduct one small group session in French if there was sufficient participation from the Francophone community.

Small Group Discussions: Outcomes and Recommendations

One of the most important aspects of the forum was the opportunity for participants to break into small groups to discuss issues of particular concern to them that had emerged from the research. The recommendations from the research was categorized into four specific topics, namely,

- **family violence and firearms,**
- **family violence and animal abuse,**
- **public education and training strategies and**
- **risk assessment tools,**

Participants selected the small groups they wished to attend according to their own interests and backgrounds. Each group used flip charts and report back forms to record their conversation. Someone in each group volunteered to represent the group for a “report back” to the entire group at the end of the day. The following are summaries of the discussion groups, based on flip charts and notes, including the suggestions that stemmed from the four report-backs at the end of the forum.

Firearms Victimization

Discussion of firearms victimization centered on the *Firearms Act* and firearms registration issues. Participants felt that due to the gun culture in rural areas, there is negative community perception of the gun registry. This needs to be dealt with. The application process to register a firearm requires either signatures of a spouse/partner, or the spouse/partner must be contacted by office of the Chief Firearms Officer. However, victimized spouses/partners may feel pressured to sign. Furthermore, many women are unaware that the toll free number exists to report firearms abuse by a spouse. While enforcement is the key to dealing with such problems, a legal framework is the necessary first step. For example, the majority of firearms seized are seized because of improper storage, which can be enforced by the *Firearms Act* and necessary changes to criminal code sections concerning firearms violations.

Participants felt the propensity for people, including professionals, to minimize firearms lethality risk to rural women should be dealt with through increased education. This would illustrate the relationship between firearms and woman abuse in rural communities. Such education could be available to professionals, including law enforcement, as well as the community in general, perhaps by organizations such as Public Legal Education and Information Service. Since police have a wide discretion in this area, education could have a significant impact on the questions they ask of abused women. Education could help to standardize law enforcement procedures. As it stands now, court orders for the revocation of firearms and preventative orders are dependent upon the discretion of judges or crown prosecutors. These parties make different decisions for different reasons, and such education would put them on the same page.

Participants felt that if the police are required to adopt a more standardized response to firearms removal in domestic calls it would be beneficial. However, participants expressed concern regarding the backlash by gun owners when guns are seized since some gun owner's hold negative stereotypes and attitudes towards law enforcement and gun control laws. Furthermore, seizure of firearms may not solve the problem: as one participant suggested, "If you take his three guns, his friends will loan him twenty more." This goes back to community perceptions of firearms removal. Police participants indicated they generally felt they had a sufficient legal framework for preventative orders, but only if they have evidence of improper storage, or evidence the firearms were directly involved in an offence. The problem is the firearms that the police are not aware of. For example, it was pointed out that just because the police have grounds to seize one gun, they do not necessarily have grounds to search for others. The police need increased power and authority to search for firearms, especially if family violence is an issue. The potential for lethality is significantly higher when firearms are involved; "you cannot take back a bullet."

Participants agreed that "community responsibility" is the key to developing and implementing a firearms removal policy. This is one of the main rationales behind the firearms registry. Part of the freedom of choice to own or possess firearms has to be accountability. Firearms suicides are impulse suicides, and so there is concern regarding band-aid solutions. Taking away guns does not deal with underlying causes and problems

of domestic violence. However, this may provide a valuable window of opportunity for intervention.

Community perception of firearms is important. People are often concerned about what may happen to their possessions, and where their possessions are stored, but this is less often the case with firearms. Participants agreed with the findings of the research that suggests there is an epidemic of improper storage of firearms particularly in New Brunswick. Public perceptions regarding firearms can be changed. For example, thirty years ago it would have been acceptable for a teenager to bring a rifle to school so he could go hunting later, but today this would not be allowed. The focus for developing and implementing a firearms removal policy should be on education for the community and society, with no tolerance for domestic violence. Abuse cannot and should not be normalized. The *Firearms Act* can be used as a tool because the risk that a gun owner might lose his/her firearms may be a significant deterrent. Anti-drinking and driving campaigns were successful in changing societal attitudes towards drinking and driving, and perhaps should be used as a model when looking at education campaigns for firearms safety and prevention of injury and death.

Participants expressed an overall appreciation for victims' services. Victims and witnesses are offered neutrality and support. It is important for crisis workers to know about firearms victimization risks. The problem is that victims are often concerned that by seeking help it will lead to unwanted interventions. Many women want the abusive behaviour to stop, but they do not want their partner demonized. Women may be less frightened into inaction if resources were also offered for offenders.

Family Violence and Pet/Animal Abuse

Recommendations from the second small discussion group concerned the relationship between pet or animal abuse and family violence. A representative of the Domestic Violence Court in the Moncton region brought up recent cases where the offenders were charged under section 446 of the *Criminal Code* for causing unnecessary suffering to an animal. In regards to a women's decision to remain in an abusive situation, participants felt it important to respect what a victim of abuse decides, and to provide safety and resources and remember that not all women go to transition houses.

Service providers need a better understanding of how hard it is to leave abusive situations; a better understanding would facilitate better risk assessment procedures as well. Transition house workers should ensure questions about pet abuse are included as a standard part of intake forms. But because timing is tight in domestic violence situations, participants were unsure about an animal welfare inspector's ability to investigate and then take away pets in order to make them safe.

As it stands now, participants felt there is no way to follow-up any connection between family violence and pet abuse. For example, there is no way for police or other parties to follow-up on a woman who has left an abused pet with the S.P.C.A., in order to see if she is alright. Educational awareness for animal protection officers of the relationship between pet abuse and domestic violence would mean these officers would have a better understanding that animal abuse can be an indicator that people are being abused too. This could help foster action between the cross-over of two forms of abuse. P.E.I. family violence protection legislation takes the abuser out of the house and protects pets.

Participants strongly agreed that we need public awareness campaigns to educate the public and professionals about the connection between family violence and pet abuse or farm animal abuse. Public awareness is also fostered through education of service providers, to ensure they understand the significance that pets can play in the life of an abused woman.

The first step towards community education would be looking at other regions where similar studies have been done, and to determine if there are templates available for public awareness campaigns. The community needs more understanding of research on animal abuse. Public awareness campaigns could begin with public schools and public service announcements, and move towards the community in general. The campaign is likely to be difficult because living with abuse becomes normalized. The campaign would need to show people that this abusive environment is not normal. Using statistics, quotes, and graphics would also help raise awareness. Since there is so much violence in the media, many participants expressed concern over the capacity for images of domestic violence to create enough shock-value to send the correct message. There were also concerns about just preaching to the converted.

Discussion of these recommendations generated as many questions as there were answers. It is important to remember that the S.P.C.A. is not everywhere. Foster home families are needed to take on pets when there is a domestic violence situation. However, there are concerns over extremely violent dogs; for example, those that have been trained to be violent or have been abused. There is also the issue of who is responsible for getting the animals to the safe haven, and how to transport larger animals. This problem can be solved in part through the involvement of farmers' unions and veterinarians in maintaining and transporting animals to safe havens. Furthermore, pamphlets in vet offices would help to inform the public of the connection and recruit foster families for abused pets.

While a provincial strategy for sheltering the pets of abused women is necessary, the population in general has to be sensitized to the relationship between the two types of abuse before this can take place. Organizations that would be responsible for developing such a provincial strategy would include family violence groups, government branches such as justice and social development, public safety, and women's issue branch, as well as animal welfare stakeholders, transition houses and status of women. Participants raised questions over which organization(s) or groups would be responsible for starting this initiative, and expressed concern over the need for funding. One idea was to grant subsidies to hotels that allow pets so that they could take in victims with abused pets.

Public Education and Training

The third small discussion group discussed the need for public education and training. They agreed that public education should place more emphasis on the potential lethality of firearms. Such education would include the relationship between family violence and pet/animal abuse, illustrating how pet/animal abuse is often an indicator of family violence. This education would likely result in questions about pets, firearms and common law marital status being asked during intake at transition houses. Clarification of the roles and mandates of service providers is necessary in order to understand where there are gaps and where there could be overlap in these services. Key statistics should be pointed out to service providers.

In order to deal with disconnection between agencies, reports should be made to child protection agencies whenever there is concern about family violence. Such reports

could come from the police, the S.P.C.A. or animal protection, and vets or veterinary students as well as groomers, boarders, and kennel staff. These service providers may need special training to understand the link between family violence and animal abuse.

Information regarding family violence and firearms should be provided at the intake level. A campaign extolling the positive aspects of the firearms registry would be useful to minimize negative community perceptions of the registry. For example, such a campaign could equate the firearms registry with registering your car, when registration becomes more about proof of ownership rather than control. Public awareness of the potential risks to the safety of family members when a firearm is improperly stored as well as a focus on appropriate gun use is necessary. Such campaigns also need to deal with the argument that the firearms registry is “just another tax” by showing the positive and useful aspects of the registry. Other campaigns should remind people that animal cruelty is a crime under the Criminal Code, and tell people to call 911 or Crime Stoppers if they think an animal is being abused.

Firearms safety topics can be made part of the school system. Such messages would focus on appropriate gun use, and work to remove the negative taboo stereotype surrounding weapons. Postcard message should be short and simple and specifically targeted at firearms owners. The message should be something that will motivate owners. Also, a different message might be needed for friends and neighbours of abused women, than for the gun owners themselves.

Three general messages were suggested: first, a message to owners about firearms safety and the risk of losing guns; second, a message to victims that they cannot allow themselves to become desensitized to firearms misuse, and that firearms risks cannot be normalized; and third, a message to service providers emphasizing the connection between guns and family violence, and the associated risks.

It was felt that abused women, who are threatened, are desensitized because the gun is not loaded – it is just used to threaten them. A message to abused women would also need to remind them that some day there may be a bullet, and emphasize the family and children who would be left behind if this were to happen. Statistics should be utilized in order to have the most impact; for example, a comparison of N.B. statistics to

Canadian statistics. Furthermore, because victims often tell friends and family, messages could also target these friends and family.

Specific messages concerning pet or animal abuse were discussed. A softer and more kid-friendly message was suggested: “Be nice to the people you love, be nice to your animals too.” A harder hitting message was also suggested: “People who harm animals are more likely to harm other family members.”

Some messages could be aimed at abusers, giving them encouragement to break the cycle while still holding them accountable for their actions. An abusers’ helpline would be conducive to breaking the cycle. Participants were unsure of whose responsibility it would be to create such a helpline; one suggestion was the United Way. A connection should be made to existing services such as EFAP. The need to conduct some focus groups with men was also expressed as men would be more likely to know how to word a message that men would listen to. It was suggested that such groups could be recruited through gun clubs, John Howard Societies, prisons, Monty Peters, Cons for Christ, Terrence Trites, and the farming community.

Various ideas were shared for formats for spreading the word about the connection between family violence and pet or animal abuse. This included coasters in bars, ball caps in hunter-orange colour, pet food paraphernalia. And liquor store bags. Involvement in the design and development of a public education campaign on family violence should begin with government, but must include interest groups, affected individuals and the community. Messages must speak to peers and come from peers, and males need an opportunity to be involved in the development of the campaign. For example, having the hunters’ association on board would increase the propensity for a positive response from firearms owners.

Participants also agreed that training programs and shelters for abusers are also necessary. This would provide stronger deterrence from abuse and emphasize restorative justice. Programs could offer a reminder that family violence affects everyone, not just the victims; violence affects health care, taxes, children, and creates a cycle of abuse. The abuser should also be taken out of the situation (following the PEI example); programs should not make the abused person leave, forcing women and children to find a new

environment—this punishes the wrong person. All of these recommendations require effective monitoring for offenders, such as the domestic violence court monitoring.

Risk Assessment

The fourth discussion group focused on risk assessment tools and procedures. Participants suggested the need to find ways of bringing the various social service groups together to brainstorm and assess risk as an integral part of the follow-up when an abused woman discloses that there are firearms in her home and/or that her pet is being abused to control her. Education is necessary to ensure that service providers are aware of the connection between pet and animal abuse and domestic violence. Service providers should be asking victims about their responses to pet abuse and how it affects their perception of whether they can or should leave an abusive situation.

Criminal Code and Woman Abuse Protocols determine the response in a domestic violence call. Educating police officers about the connection between family violence and animal abuse, and indirect firearms victimization may influence the way they implement their protocols. If front line workers have more knowledge of the connections, they will have a better understanding of how to respond. Service providers need to recognize that abuse of a partner's pet is part of the harassment process. There are differences in the approaches to taking away firearms between the RCMP and city police, as well as differences between PEI and NB. PEI protocols result in increased likelihood that firearms will be taken away. The enforcement culture in NB is different because of the firearms offence process, and the pressure placed on NB police because of the province's strong gun culture.

When applying for a license to own guns, if something in the eligibility process is flagged on the firearms application, further questions can be asked. For example, in light of the findings of this research study, evidence of violence towards animals may cause an official to ask whether there are children in the house, and this may lead to further queries if there is an indication of mental health problems and this can require supporting documents from physicians and so on. The NB Chief Firearms Officer noted that firearms questions are a compromise between what officials want to ask, and what is

possible based on privacy legislation. However, once a person has applied for a license and is being dealt with in the system they can be asked anything.

It was suggested that there also needs to be a change in legislation so that pets and animals are no longer considered property. This would give more importance to threats against pets. Threatening to harm an animal is not the same as threatening to harm a car, but now abusive men have the right to kill the family pet as long as they do it humanely, even when their partner is willing and able to take the pet with them.

The general public, including family, friends and neighbours, need to know about the potential situations and risk factors that put abused women, their children and pets in danger of firearms victimization and harm. As it stands now, participants felt that the public has a narrow perspective of what constitutes gun crime. A broadened public awareness of the signs and risks of firearms victimization and abuse can help prevent this abuse. Campaigns such as “Every firearm is a loaded firearm,” to remind people that an unloaded gun can also carry a threat, were discussed.

Participants also suggested that public awareness campaigns on firearms victimization and pet abuse contain reminders that gun use must be safe and gun owners must be responsible if we expect to minimize the risks of firearms abuse. This could be coupled with training courses, which could be used to incorporate and illustrate research results relating to the risk of gun violence towards abused women. Such education will help to sensitize the population. Sensitization is especially necessary as part of hunter education. Participants agreed that hunter education should discuss violence in general, rather than just about violence against women, as there might be a backlash otherwise due to the gun culture in rural communities.

Participants emphasized the importance of sharing information between service providers in order to coordinate positive outcomes for victims. There was a general consensus that while more information is being collected, this information is not being shared amongst service providers. Some of this relates to concerns for privacy and confidentiality. For example, not every probation office in NB is willing to share information about offenders that they are monitoring. Yet, coordination of outcomes leads to better decisions and having the right information to make those decisions. Participants felt that there was a disconnect in the system, For example, although

background checks are required every five years of families who are in the foster care program, an individual can have a firearms violation between this period which will go undetected until the period is up.

Collaboration among service providers and sharing of appropriate and relevant information can be resolved through reasonable arrangements between agencies, where one agency can share their assessment of a person's risk with another agency without necessarily compromising privacy rights. For example, transition house workers can ask for signed consent to share their information with the police. This comes down to liability in information sharing for privacy violations, versus liability for not sharing in terms of failure to act. This is why there is a need for a coordinated system that gives people the go-ahead to share such information. Currently, there are different rules for disclosure and different perceptions of the issues among different agencies so that individual ingenuity is needed to share relevant information when necessary.

Evaluation

At the end of the forum, participants were asked to complete a forum evaluation (see Appendix F – Forum Evaluation). Analysis of the evaluation forms indicates that the workshop was highly successful - 94% of the 17 participants who filled out evaluation forms reported that the morning presentation was an effective way to learn about the outcomes of the research. Only 6% would have liked more information. Comments about the presentation included “interesting statistics.” 88% of the participants indicated they had gained a better understanding of the nature and dimensions of firearms victimization experienced by some abused rural women and the connection to pet abuse.

When asked to indicate their reason for attending the forum, 94% of participants reported an interest in the subject matter as a reason for their participating, while 56% participated in order to share ideas about preventing family, firearms victimization and animal abuse relating to domestic violence, while some wanted to network with other like-minded individuals. This outcome is consistent with the purpose and goals of the forum. Sixty-five percent of participants found the small group discussions to be an effective way of contributing their ideas and views on how to create safer environments

for abused rural women, their children and their pets or farm animals, while 41% said this was only somewhat effective.

All but one of the participants felt that the report back following the small discussion groups accurately reflected the group discussions. Eighty-two percent of participants left the forum feeling encouraged to become involved in working with others to address family violence issues. At the end of the day participants indicated they felt motivated by the discussion, were pleased that they had participated, and many were interested in meeting again to discuss the issues in more depth. Further comments and suggestions from the evaluation forms include:

“Excellent forum! Will take (what I learned) back to my organization – Fredericton S.P.C.A.”;

“This study has had an immediate impact on the Firearms Office. It also raised awareness on the lack of coordinated responses; such a valuable study for educational awareness purposes and promoting community program actions.”

Conclusion and Follow-Up

Generally speaking, the participants at the forum appreciated the opportunity to learn about and discuss the research findings firsthand. The goal of the forum, and the use of small group discussion, was to foster continued community involvement and to identify recommendations that could be acted on immediately or that might require collaborations as well as advocacy for change. Participants enjoyed participating in the small group discussions and their lively and heated debates on the topics resulted in the identification of many suggestions for moving the recommendations forward. Some participants noted that they would be implementing changes to their own practice or policies immediately in response to the research findings. For example, a police officer noted that he had never thought about the connection between pet abuse and family violence previously, and that he would now react differently at a domestic call when the abusive partner was not allowing the woman to take the family pet with her. Representatives from transition houses indicated that they would immediately start to incorporate “questions on abuse of pets in training and safety plans.” The representative

from the Fredericton S.P.C.A. mentioned that she was going to explore the possibility of having dog and cat crates set aside for women in transition. Many other participants noted that they planned to spread the word about their findings and educate their co-workers. Other participants simply expressed their appreciation for being given the opportunity to share their ideas and many indicated that they planned to stay involved. Almost all the participants emphasized that they would continue to work with other stakeholders in the community to address firearms victimization and pet abuse. The researchers made a commitment to share their PowerPoint presentation with anyone who was interested and to distribute the “forum report” to participants as well.

List of Appendices

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Appendix A – Invitees unable to attend

Alice Crook	Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre Atlantic Veterinary College
Brenda Thomas	Victim Services, Community and Correctional Services
Carmen Poulin	UNB Psychology Department
Debrah Westerburg	Sanctuary House
Hilary Drain	Crown Prosecutor
Jim Murray	UNB Dean of Faculty of Arts
Leanne Fitch	Fredericton Deputy Chief of Police
Linda Neilson	UNB Sociology Department
Lise Bellefleur	Violence Prevention Initiatives – Women’s Issue Branch
Marisa Pelkey	Public Safety – Victim Services Coordinator
Michael Berry	Fredericton Police
Phenny Bryden	Social Development
Roxann Morin	Social Development
Shirley Kearney	Maison de “Passage” House Inc
Suzanne Blaney Tremblay	Violence Prevention Initiatives – Women’s Issue Branch
Valerie Kilfoil	Justice and Consumer Affairs
Valerie Smallman	PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women
Vanda Rideout	UNB Sociology Department

Appendix B - Forum Agenda



Family Violence, Firearms & Animal Abuse Forum

May 26, 2008
9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Fredericton Inn
315 Regent St.
Fredericton, NB
(506) 455-1430

Co-principal researchers: Dr. Deborah Doherty and Dr. Jennie Hornosty

Agenda

9:00 a.m.	Overview of findings (continental breakfast provided)	<i>Salon A</i>
10:30 a.m.	Nutrition Break	
10:45 a.m.	Small discussion groups	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Family Violence and FirearmsFamily Violence and Pet/Farm Animal Abuse	<i>Salon A</i> <i>Prince Edward Room</i>
12:00 p.m.	Lunch	<i>The Brass Rail</i>
1:15 p.m.	Small discussion groups	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Public Education and TrainingRisk Assessment Tools	<i>Salon A</i> <i>Prince Edward Room</i>
2:30 p.m.	Nutrition Break	
2:45 p.m.	Report back from discussion groups	<i>Salon A</i>
4:30 p.m.	Wrap-up	<i>Salon A</i>

Contact Information

Dr. Deborah Doherty
Public Legal Education and Information Service of
New Brunswick
(506) 453-7958
deborah.doherty@gnb.ca

Dr. Jennie Hornosty
Sociology Department
University of New Brunswick
(506) 458-7445
hornosty@unb.ca

Appendix C – Small Group Discussions

Small Group Discussion #1

Recommendations Relating to Firearms Victimization of Rural Women and Children

Brainstorm the following recommendations for 20 minutes and use the Report Back Sheet to record your comments and suggestions. The Report Back Sheet includes four questions to help you structure your discussion. We will come together and share the highlights of our discussions with each other.

- **Ensure that risk assessment tools include questions about the misuse and abuse of firearms.** In this study, we heard of many different risk assessment tools being used to identify an abused woman's risk. Several people felt that despite the use of different tools, they should measure the same thing – such as firearms lethality risk. Currently they do not. Although some of the transition houses we worked with had asked about “weapons” prior to the study, others did not. Many did not include a question on their forms about pet abuse. In light of the findings from this study, it is important that all risk assessment instruments include such questions. It is important that no matter which tool is being used to assess a situation, that the outcome will be the same.
- **Support a series of gun safety commercials targeted at rural communities /provinces:** Several participants suggested that government create a series of commercials, similar to the drinking and driving commercials that focus on firearms risk. The commercials would demonstrate how the cavalier attitude to firearms misuse can turn deadly – this would include scenarios around target practice in the woods, drinking and firearms misuse, firearms that are used as an instrument of control, accidents related to firearms, firearms used to control women and children, etc. The goal is to make gun safety as “normalized” as buckling up a seat belt, or anti-drinking and driving.
- **Recognize that women's fear of firearms may be indirect:** We learned that indirect threat of firearms, such as loaded firearms under the bed, in the closet, on the fishing boat, or “propped by the door at supper time”, can generate considerable fear for abused women, and prevent disclosure when women are dealing with the police and service providers. This situation creates a huge potential for victimization of intimate partners.
- **Share information about the *Firearms Act* and its provisions relating to family violence:** Currently when a person applies for a firearms license, he/she must provide the name of any live-in spouse or common-law partner in the past two years. Although these persons are supposed to be notified about the application and given a toll free number to call if they have any concerns such as for their own safety, suicide, etc., none of the women we interviewed told us they had been contacted, and several specifically mentioned they had never heard of this. Given the numbers of unregistered firearms, perhaps this is not surprising.

- **Create pro-removal and pro-confiscation firearms policies similar to pro-arrest and pro-charge policies:** Participants were not unanimous in their recommendations about confiscating firearms in family violence cases. Nevertheless, they were unanimous in their belief that women's safety was paramount. Not surprisingly, almost all of the women we interviewed who had been victimized felt that guns should be automatically removed from the home at the first domestic violence call. We therefore recommend that removal practices become more standardized in relation to police discretion to apply for a preventive protection order under Section 1.11 of the *Criminal Code*. The pro-removal policy would be based on establishing that the woman is not fearful, rather than requiring her to express fear. If such a policy is put in place, police would need the assurance of the Courts that their actions in removing firearms would pass judicial review and that the firearms would be confiscated.
 - **Confiscate firearms for unsafe storage violations:** The recommendation above refers to confiscation of firearms. Confiscation is currently mandatory for certain offences and for various time periods. Participants in this study felt that firearms should also be confiscated even when a person was charged with careless use or unsafe storage (Section 86 of the *Criminal Code*). When people who own guns do not follow the rules of safety, everyone is at risk and the guns should be confiscated.
 - **Restrict firearms access on stay-away and no-contact orders, and peace bonds in all domestic cases:** Participants strongly supported the inclusion of provisions to restrict firearms in domestic violence cases under such orders as emergency protection orders, peace bonds, or stay away orders and so on. It was pointed that judges have in the past made arrangements for defendants under firearms restrictions to have their firearms available for hunting.
 - **Ensure follow up and support for victims following a charge and better enforcement of protective orders:** Several interviewees spoke of their positive experience with the police during a crisis; but they expressed considerable disappointment and dismay at their treatment in the months following. Although this is clearly a generalization based on only a few cases, the women we interviewed felt that there was a need for much better follow up on breaches of peace bonds and protection orders, particularly where there is a fear of firearms victimization. Breaches must be taken seriously and result in immediate incarceration. Participants described extremely positive experiences with victim services and every effort should be made to ensure their involvement in domestic violence cases.
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Small Group Discussion #2

Recommendations Relating to Abuse of Pets and Farm Animals

Brainstorm the following recommendations for 20 minutes and use the Report Back Sheet to record your comments and suggestions. The Report Back Sheet includes four questions to help you structure your discussion. We will come together and share the highlights of our discussions with each other.

- **Create a Public Education Campaign:** The findings of this research demonstrate that abusing pets and farm animals to control and intimidate a spouse is a fairly common occurrence. Moreover, abused women often delay seeking help because of this. All participants agreed that an education and public awareness campaign – one that shared the findings of this study and encouraged people to show respect and sensitivity to victims of abuse who were concerned about their animals – would be helpful. This would include education about the risks associated with family violence and the presence of firearms, abuse of animals, and other factors uncovered in the research study.
- **Develop a safe haven program for pets and farm animals:** When discussing solutions and strategies for helping abused rural women with pets, the participants suggested that communities set up safe shelters for animals of abused women – places where woman and children could maintain contact with the animals until they could recover their animals. As one woman suggested,
There needs to be a spot where you can say ok I need to take my cat for awhile I'm in an abusive place. I need you to take them and they take them for awhile and you can go back and get them. A place that you can leave your cats there, leave your information and everything, and you don't have to pay, because a lot of women that are in abuse don't have money.

It was suggested that veterinarians offer free care such as inoculations to assist in making the program viable. In the case of larger animals, foster farms might be needed. In order to establish consistent and appropriate responses throughout the two provinces, it was suggested that a working group be established of researchers, veterinarians, animal welfare workers, SPCA staff, transition house workers, and even Kindness Club, to explore possibilities and establish an actual “safe shelter program”.

- **Provide stronger legal protections for the animals of victims of domestic violence.** Participants noted that the connection between family violence and animal abuse should be recognized in our laws. In our focus group, we learned that police were including pets in Emergency Protection Orders in Prince Edward Island; however, there was little enforcement of a new provincial law, *Companion Animal Protection Act*, because the police and the public were not aware of it. This suggests

- **Award “custody” of pets to the victim.** Since pets are seen as marital property, police have been reluctant to make decisions about taking a pet away from an abusive man who refuses to let it go. The recommendation above could solve this problem. However, it also has been suggested that the courts could make better use of “exclusive possession” provisions in marital property law to ensure victims of abuse get the pets (and the children!).
 - **Link animal abuse and to other forms of abuse - child abuse and senior abuse:** Several participants noted that “where pets are being abused, people will be next”. Several people suggested that animal welfare authorities and child protection authorities should not be working under mutually exclusive laws. Rather, in order to ensure coordination, governments should amend child protection legislation to require animal welfare officers, and others who suspect animal abuse, to report their concerns to child welfare authorities as a possible form of child abuse and/or family violence. Prince Edward Island has already included this in their laws. As well, we were told that in light of the demographic profile of our population, and baby boomers moving into retirement, we must be mindful of the control and intimidation of elderly persons using pets or firearms may be a continuation of abuse across the life span. In fact several participants noted cases of older women whose pets were abused by their partners, but because they no longer had children at home, they were not eligible for particular programs and services geared towards women with children. Even accessing domestic legal aid was difficult for older women without children.
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Small Group Discussion #3

Recommendations Relating to Risk Assessment Tools

Brainstorm the following recommendations for 20 minutes and use the Report Back Sheet to record your comments and suggestions. The Report Back Sheet includes four questions to help you structure your discussion. We will come together and share the highlights of our discussions with each other.

Coordinate risk assessment tools to ensure that they incorporate research evidence-based risks such as abuse of pets, indirect fears of firearms, etc.:

Participants expressed concern that our risk assessment tools do not always guarantee that professionals identify the same high risks. One participant explained that:

We need to be talking about the same things. I may be looking at one situation going ‘wow’, and a police officer may be going to the door and saying, well he didn’t do anything criminal.

Ensure that questions about pet/farm animal abuse are included on in-take forms and risk assessments: Some of the crisis workers and victim service workers, who participated in the survey and interviews, also participated in focus groups. We learned that many of them had not been asking abused women about pet abuse previously. They were amazed at the response to this question and they strongly recommended that it become a standard question on risk assessment tools and in-take forms – not just harm to pets, but threats to harm or neglect pets, and farm animals as well.

I think this study, I know myself...that we were supposed to ask clients, y'know “Has he been abusive to any of the pets?” ...it was amazing to me, the questions that I wasn't asking and then you would get a response where they're saying “ Yeah, he threatened the cat,” or “He kicks the dog.”. .. It was surprising to me, because I probably wasn't asking the question before unless it was obvious.

Although some service providers in this study already asked about pet abuse, others did not. Some asked about firearms in the home, but not about firearms kept elsewhere. People did not ask abused women about their fears relating to easy access to firearms, nor did they explore the nature of indirect fear and intimidation. In our focus groups, people suggested that the findings of this current study be incorporated into all risk assessments tools – particularly those used in rural provinces. They felt that professionals conducting assessments should be trained to understand the impact of cultural factors on decision-making and to account for such factors when attempting to assess greater levels of fear and increased risk. In addition, we have found that women in common-law relationships are over-represented as victims of abuse in this study which is something that is noteworthy. Clearly, not all common-law partners are abusive, just as not all firearms owners abuse their partners, yet the strong association with increased risk in relation to other risk factors is important to recognize.

- **Enact legislation to compel certain professionals (mental health and doctors) to report concerns about the stability of a gun owner:** It was suggested that professionals, in particular healthcare professionals, routinely inquire about the presence of a firearm in the home and inform people of the risks of home ownership if one is present. This could encompass awareness of the risk for women living with family violence, of children due to accident or suicide, and of the gun owner to commit suicide and/or domestic homicide. Such legislation has been introduced in Quebec, and several participants encouraged us to recommend similar legislation in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island that would obligate physicians to share concerns about lethality with the appropriate authorities and with the victim. In other words, physicians would make a recommendation for the removal of firearms from the home in cases where there are risk factors for domestic violence, domestic homicide, unintentional injury, and suicide. Other professionals who might be covered under such legislation would be transition house crisis workers, although there was not agreement about the value of this. The effectiveness of such a recommendation should be evaluated in a pilot situation.
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Small Group Discussion #4

Recommendations Relating to Public Education and Training

Brainstorm the following recommendations for 20 minutes and use the Report Back Sheet to record your comments and suggestions. The Report Back Sheet includes four questions to help you structure your discussion. We will come together and share the highlights of our discussions with each other.

- **Educate police, justice officials, and service providers on the nature and extent of firearms victimization in rural homes:** The findings of this study demonstrate that a significant number of abused rural women are experiencing abuse with firearms, and that people in rural communities tend to normalize and minimize the abuse. We must introduce an education strategy for abused women and for the professionals with whom they come into contact which identifies the nature of firearms victimization in abusive homes. We must make the link to other factors that exacerbate risk when firearms are present such as alcohol/drug addictions, harming pets/farm animals, mental health problem including threatening suicide, and so on. Education on firearms abuse, as suggested in the recommendation about commercials, must challenge the high tolerance that many people in rural communities, including professionals, have for firearms misuse and abuse. This includes challenging the “gun culture” that posits that guns in rural homes, even those that are improperly stored, kept loaded, and not registered or licensed, are only used for “peaceful” purposes.
- **Encourage abused women to think about personal safety issues – explain risk.** When a woman is considering leaving an abusive relationship, and firearms are present, service providers and other support people (as well as friends and neighbours) must be able to encourage her to think about the ways in which she can provide for her safety and the safety of her children. In light of the prevalence of firearms in farm and rural households, rural women need to be advised of how to take precautions. Does she know where the guns are stored and where he keeps the key to the gun cabinet? Where are there guns hidden and are they kept loaded? Where is the ammunition? She should be encouraged to plan an escape route that takes into account, the location of guns in the home. Participants recommended that educate women, without scaring them, to realize that separation can be an extremely dangerous time, and that they must have a safety plan not only for living with and leaving abuse, but for living separately.
- **Ensure that questions about pet/farm animal abuse are included on in-take forms and risk assessments:** Some of the crisis workers and victim service workers, who participated in the survey and interviews, also participated in focus groups. We learned that many of them had not been asking abused women about pet abuse previously. They were amazed at the response to this question and they strongly recommended that it become a standard question on risk assessment tools and in-take forms – not just harm to pets, but threats to harm or neglect pets, and farm animals as well.

I think this study, I know myself...that we were supposed to ask clients, y'know “Has he

been abusive to any of the pets?" ...it was amazing to me, the questions that I wasn't asking and then you would get a response where they're saying " Yeah, he threatened the cat," or "He kicks the dog." .. It was surprising to me, because I probably wasn't asking the question before unless it was obvious.

- **Create a Public Education Campaign about the link between family violence and pet/animal abuse.** The findings of this research demonstrate that abusing pets and farm animals to control and intimidate a spouse is a fairly common occurrence. Moreover, abused women often delay seeking help because of this. All participants agreed that an education and public awareness campaign – one that shared the findings of this study and encouraged people to show respect and sensitivity to victims of abuse who were concerned about their animals – would be helpful. This would include education about the risks associated with family violence and the presence of firearms, abuse of animals, and other factors uncovered in the research study.

Report Back Sheet

Discussion Topic #1: Firearms Victimization

1. Were you surprised by the finding that abused rural women with firearms in their homes are victimized by firearm? Were you surprised that many people, including professionals, minimize firearms lethality risk to rural women experiencing family violence because of their association with legitimate pursuits such as hunting?

2. Would it be beneficial if police forces were required to adopt a more standardized response to firearms removal when they go to domestic calls? Do you feel pro-firearms removal policies in ANY domestic violence situation would help to reduce the risk of firearms death – murder-suicide?

3. Who is responsible for developing and implementing a firearms removal policy? What is communities' role, if any, in lobbying for such a policy?

4. How important is it for crisis workers to know about firearms victimization risk and to educate abused rural women about the potential for things to turn deadly? How would they do this without frightening women into inaction?

Report Back Sheet

Discussion Topic #2: Family Violence and Animal – Pet Abuse

1. Do you understand why an abused woman might make the decision not to leave an abusive situation because of concerns to her animals? How can service providers respect this attachment, yet still provide advice on seeking safety?

2. Do we need a campaign to educate the public (and professionals) about the connection between family violence and pet abuse or farm animal abuse? Who should be involved? What are some of the key messages that you would want them to hear?

3. What might a “safe-haven” program for pets of abused women look like in your community? What about farm animals- like a pony or chickens? Who would become involved in setting it up program?

4. Do we need to have a provincial strategy for sheltering pets of abused women? Who would be responsible for developing it? Who might some of the partners be?

Report Back Sheet

Discussion Topic #3: Public Education and Training

1. Based on the findings of this study, what does the public need to know about the connection between firearms and family violence?

2. What are some of the key messages about family violence generally, and firearms victimization and abuse of animals, in specific, that could be shared directly with women and community?

3. What should be the tone of these messages and what formats might work?

4. Who needs to be involved in designing and developing a public education campaign on family violence that includes messages about firearms victimization and animal abuse? Who requires more detailed training on these findings?

Report Back Sheet

Discussion Topic #4: Risk Assessment

1. When an abused woman acknowledges that there are firearms in her home, and/or that an animal is being abused to control her, the red flags go up. What follow up should occur? What information might you share with the woman about the status of the firearms, the safe storage of firearms, the location of firearms, indirect fears, reporting of misuses, etc.?

2. How might legislation and enhanced protocols work to reduce firearms victimization risk? To children, to seniors, abused women?

3. Does the general public (family, friends and neighbours) need to know about the potential situations (risk factors) that put abused women, as well as their children and pets, in danger of firearms victimization and harm? How would one share risk assessment information with the public?

4. There are many different risk assessment tools used by police, probation, transition houses, mental health, etc. How can we ensure coordination of outcomes?

Appendix E – Participant List

Name	Affiliation
Barbara Lemieux	Community & Individual Development/Social Development
Brian Doyle	N.B. Chief Firearms Officer
Christen Tomah-Plume	Gignoo House
Jeanie Whitehead	Fredericton S.P.C.A.
Jennifer Kelly	Women's Issue Branch
Joanne Boucher	Moncton Domestic Violence Court
Joy Coffin	P.E.I Victim Services
Kafiy-Nzeya-Weva	Women's Issue Branch
Lanette Ruff	R.A.V.E. Project (UNB)
Lauren Saliba	N.B. Advisory Council on the Status of Women
Maria Conway	Social Work Student
Nancy Feeney-Barrett	Victim Services
Natalie Essiembre	Status of Women in Canada/Program Officer
Patty Michaud	Miramichi Outreach Services
Rina Arseneault	Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre
Scott MacKenzie	Fredericton Police
Trista O.	Criminal Justice Student
Vicki Cosgrove	Family Violence Outreach Coordinator (Charlotte County)
Vivian Hayward	P.E.I. Chief Firearms Officer
Yvette Molyneaux	Miramichi Outreach Services
Ross Chandler	Fredericton Police
Emily Bell	PLEIS-NB
Erin Beam	PLEIS-NB

Appendix F –Forum Evaluation



Family Violence, Firearms and Animal Abuse

A Forum for Discussing the Findings and Promoting Action

May 26, 2008

Evaluation Form

Your feedback is important to us

1) What was your interest in coming to this forum? (Please circle all that apply)

- A. I am interested in the topic(s)
- B. I work with victims of family violence
- C. I work with animals and am concerned about the link to family violence
- D. I appreciate the opportunity to share ideas about preventing family, firearms victimization and animal abuse relating to domestic violence
- E. I wanted to learn more about how to incorporate evidence-based practices into my own work with rural communities
- F. I wanted the opportunity to network with others
- G. I want to become more involved in addressing family violence issues
- H. Other? _____

2) Was the morning presentation on the findings an effective way to learn about the outcome of the research?

- A. yes B. no C. Would have liked more information

Comments:

3) Did you gain a better understanding of the nature and dimensions of firearms victimization experienced by some abused rural women and the connection to pet abuse?

- A. yes B. no C. somewhat

4) Were the small group discussions an effective way for you to contribute your ideas and views on how to create safer environments for abused rural woman, their children and their pets/farm animals?

- A. yes B. no C. somewhat

5) Did the report back accurately reflect the group discussion?

- A. yes B. no C. somewhat

6) Are you leaving here today feeling encouraged to become involved in working with others to address family violence issues (such as firearms victimization and pet abuse)?

A. yes B. no C. somewhat

Comment: How do you plan to stay involved?

7) What was your feeling at the end of the day? (Circle all that apply)

- A. I was motivated by the discussion (met interesting people, heard fresh ideas,)
- B. I felt good about having participated in today's event
- C. I was discouraged (too many vested interests, lack of concern...)
- D. I was frustrated (did not feel my voice had any impact)
- E. I would be interested in meeting again to discuss issues more at length
- F. I am undecided about the usefulness of this forum

Do you have any further comments or suggestions?

Thank you for taking the time to fill this out.

We hope to be working with you in the near future

Appendix G – Subsidy Application Form



Family Violence, Firearms and Animal Abuse
A Forum for Discussing the Findings and Promoting
Action
May 26, 2008

Subsidy Application Form

We are pleased to be able to provide limited subsidies for travel and lodging for those who require it. In order to stretch our resources as far as possible, we are asking individuals requesting assistance to share travel where this is possible. We can book you a room at the Fredericton Inn for Sunday night. The rate at the Fredericton Inn is \$89 for a room; please tell them you are there for Monday's forum. Again, please consider sharing a hotel room where appropriate if you are traveling with another person. If you wish to stay at another hotel, the maximum amount we can reimburse is \$89. Please have invoices with you at the forum. All meals are provided free of charge at the conference. Travel costs can be reimbursed on the base rate of 35¢ per kilometre from the attendees' homes to Fredericton and return.

If you wish to apply for a subsidy, please fill out this form and return it to either Dr. Deborah Doherty or Dr. Jennie Hornosty.

Name: _____

Name of Organization or Group: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone: _____ **Fax:** _____ **Email:** _____

Number of kilometres claimed: From _____ to Fredericton return = _____ km

Amount claimed for hotel (one night – receipt required): \$ _____

Please tell us in a total of 50 words or less:

What does your organization or community group hope you will gain from your participation in this forum? _____ _____ _____ _____
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Subsidy applications must be submitted on May 26, 2008
Please complete this form and submit it to Deborah or Jennie