

Rural Women and Community Well-Being

Presentation to “Looking Back, Thinking Ahead” Conference,
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Rural Women's Issues Committee of Saskatchewan**

Women's Health and Gender

- ♀ Women have differing biology: reproductive health and other effects, e.g heart symptoms.
- ♀ Women's and men's lives differ across the lifespan – due to biology and social roles.
- ♀ Women and men have different usage patterns of health and related services.
- ♀ Caregiving roles differ - women provide much of unpaid care and are concentrated in some health care professions.
- ♀ Diversity among women.



Women, Policy-makers, Researchers ←

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**Health Canada - Bureau of Women's
Health and Gender Analysis**

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Women's Health Contribution Program (est. 1996)

- Centres of Excellence - Atlantic, Prairie, (Quebec), Ontario, BC
- Working Groups - Health Reform, Aboriginal Women, Health Protection
- Information - Canadian Women's Health Network



PWHCE Priorities

- ✓ Aboriginal women's health
- ✓ Rural women's health
- ✓ Women, health and poverty
- ✓ Gender in health planning

“Rural, Remote & Northern Women’s Health: Policy & Research Directions”

- RRNWH - national study by Centres of Excellence.
- Research & focus groups across Canada, 2002-04.
- Pros and cons of living in rural and northern locations.



RRNWH - Research Recommendations

1. Make research useful.
2. Involve rural women in the research process.
3. Select topics of research that are relevant to rural women.

RRNWH - Policy Recommendations

1. Factor gender, place and culture into health policy.
- 2 Define health policy as more than health care services.
- 3 (a) Improve access to health information.
- 3 (b) “ “ “ services.
- 3 (c) “ “ “ appropriate care.
- 3 (d) “ “ “ decision-making.

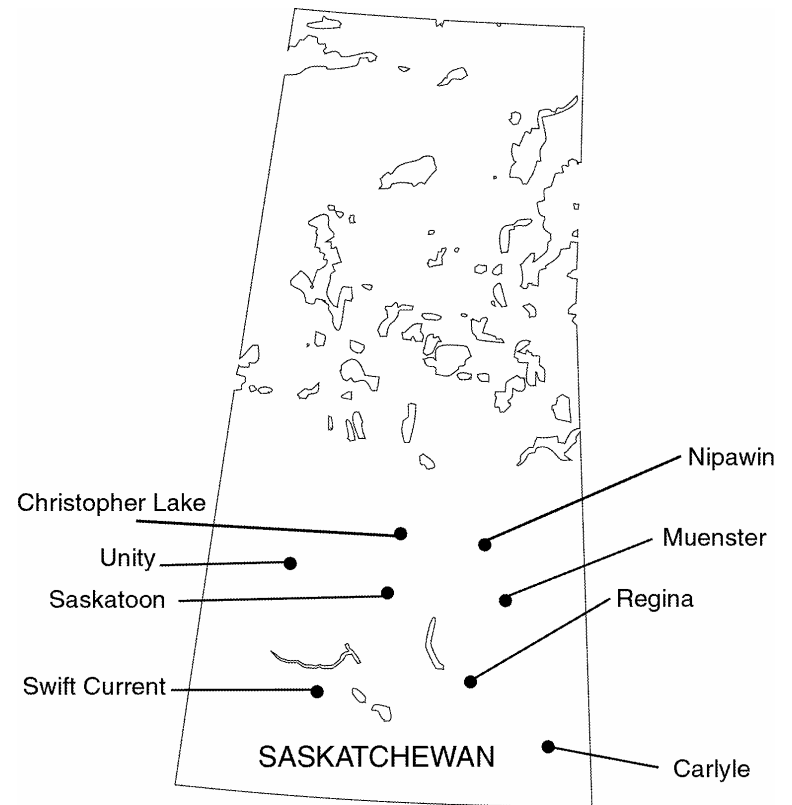
Rural Women's Issues Committee of Saskatchewan



Work
with
rural
women
started
as follow-
up to
RRNWH
report.

RWICS Workshops

- Young,
- Nipawin,
- Swift Current,
- Carlyle,
- Unity,
- Christopher Lake,
- Muenster



***Support from PWHCE,
Status of Women Canada,
volunteer committee members***

RWICS Activities

- At workshops women defined concerns, positive visions for future, actions to achieve visions.
- Produced reports, newsletters, website.
- Communicated recommendations to media, policy-makers.
- Offered grants to local groups.



Current Situation

- Rural women have decent education, capable, skilled.
- Triple workload: family, farm, off-farm work.
- Focused on maintaining families and local communities.
- Adjusting to fluctuating economy.
- Maintaining local organizations in the face of rural depopulation or population changes.
- Traditional women's organizations not thriving.

FARM WIFE —



Adapted from *Farmer's Almanac*

TEXT BY RHONDA KLASSEN

RWICS Themes

- Women in Leadership
- Health
- Community
- Farming
- Environment



Women & Leadership - 1

- **Self respect**, women taking time to care for themselves, self-care is not selfish.
- **Recognition** of the important roles played by rural women.
- **Compensation** for the work done by women, including farm work, childcare, elder care.

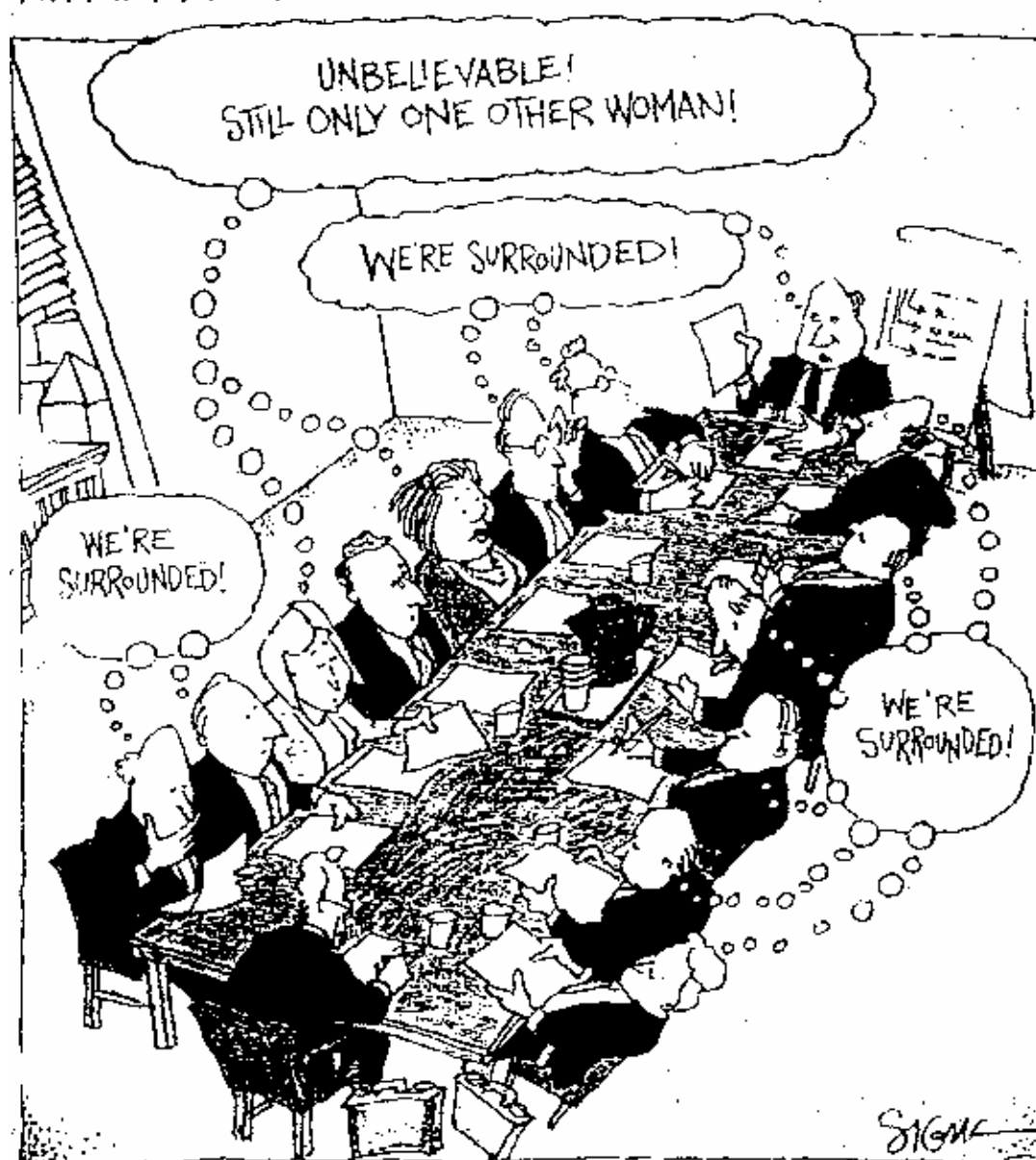


Women & Leadership - 2

- **Funding** for women's organizations & projects, business & IT networks
- **Networks** involving rural women, workshops, websites
- **Women in leadership positions**, boards and commissions, political office, policy-making
- **Training** for leadership in public life



AFFIRMATIVE DISTRACTION



Health - 1

- Inform women, the health care system and the public about **women's health** and health services.
- **Better communication** with and between health care providers.
- **Provide advocates** for patients and their families navigating the health care system.
- **Coordinate travel** and medical appointments, recognize costs of travel due to centralization.



Health - 2



- **Provide local access:** diagnostic & emergency services, cancer support, palliative care, long-term doctors, nurse practitioners, visiting specialists, physiotherapy, midwifery.
- Keep **seniors actively living** in home communities through health services, transportation, adult day care and respite care, home maintenance, housing.
- Enhance **homecare and respite care** for seniors, children and adults with disabilities.



Health - 3

- Greater understanding of **mental health**, more services, holistic mental health, understand community role .
- Understand **women & pharmaceuticals.**
- **Positive lifestyles**, alternative health services available.
- Public funding of **medical research.**



Health - 4

- Affordable, available, **quality nutritious food.**
- Better understanding of nutrition.
- Better school nutrition.
- Community kitchens.
- Inter-cultural potlucks.



Community - 1

- Provide **positive role models** for children & youth. Involve in community. Provide appropriate services.
- **Eliminate violence** against women and in families.
- Address and **prevent vandalism & bullying** in schools & communities.
- **Respect** yourself & others, other cultures. Rebuild intergenerational connections.



Community - 2

- **Keep schools alive**, playing a broader role in the community.
- Expand adult education opportunities in rural areas & provide **support for women accessing education**.
- **Childcare** for young mothers, farmers, supporting work and educational involvement.
- **Rural employment** opportunities, work with unions



Community - 3

- Maintain and make **good use of current buildings**, suitable housing for youth and seniors.
- **Good roads, public transport, railways.**
- **Positive visions** for communities.
- **Positive rural economy**, address rural poverty.
- Rural areas become **inviting places** for young families and new Canadians.



Farming

- Adequate income for farm families, farmers get their **fair share** of the food dollars.



- **Greater understanding** of farming among non-farmers.
- Strong Wheat Board and **marketing tools** for farmers, improved grain handling system.
- **Government funded research** on agriculture for the public good.

Environment

- **Inform** public, change attitudes towards environment.
- Protect & improve **air & water quality**.
- **Agricultural practices** respect environment.
- Individuals take action to **conserve energy and recycle**, more local recycling available.
- **Simplify lifestyles**, consume less, enjoy more.





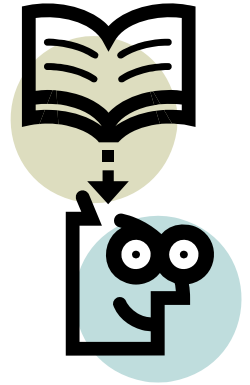
Connecting Rural Women

- E-mail, high-speed Internet & teleconferencing are useful.
- Face to face meetings are important, but difficult with a widely-spread population.
- Women willing to gather within one hour of home.
- Women like activities with some relaxation and fun.
- Lack of rural women's groups makes connecting more difficult.



Carrying Research Forward

- Communicated research recommendations.
- Women related recommendations to their lives.
- Workshops built on research, defining actions that Saskatchewan rural women would like to see to improve the well-being of themselves and their communities.
- Process initiated activities moving the report recommendations forward.



Involving Rural Women in Policy

- Rural women hesitant to engage at policy levels.
- Question whether rural voice will be heard.
- Women want leadership skills, also need confidence to act publicly or outside their local area.
- Need a culture that encourages women to take a role in public policy development.



Leaders for Tomorrow: Rural Women Creating Change

- Workshop, Feb 7 & 8, 2009, Davidson, Saskatchewan
- Twenty-five women - farm, town and urban, diverse backgrounds. Opening Métis prayer

Talked about self-care to keep energies high as women and leaders, took part in a mini-exercise session



Discussed media and communications methods to reach rural women and communities,



and to get rural women's messages to others

Also did
some fun
communication /
improv
exercises



Leadership and Links

- Rural women are leaders – political, community, church, family, healthcare, services, education, elected, appointed, volunteer, activist, advocacy for others.
- Many ways, including training, to support women to become or be better leaders, including young, seniors, people of different cultural backgrounds.
- Conclusions: Difficult to define “rural”. While farm, town and other women not in cities have some separate issues, today in Saskatchewan, the boundaries between rural and urban are blurred. Women from different areas are concerned about women elsewhere. End the isolation. All women need to be linking together across the province.

What's Next for RWICS?

- This phase of RWICS project completed.
- Future - info sharing on rural women's topics.
- New links between rural and urban women.



- Website: www.ruralwomensask.ca

Rural women have positive ideas about the changes needed to improve the well-being of themselves and their communities.

Yet too often, their voices are not heard.



Through
this work
we hope to
bring
forward the
voices of
rural
women.