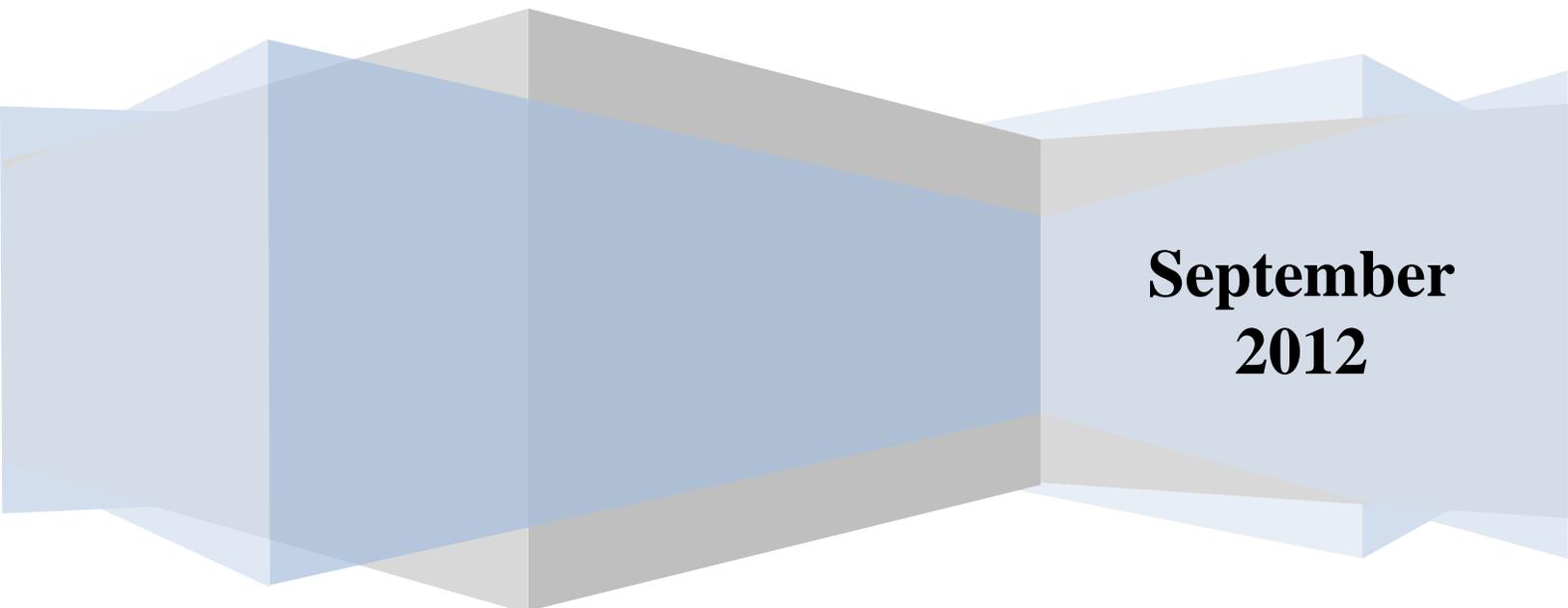


Rural Poverty in Nova Scotia:
A Position Paper

**Differences in the experience of poverty
in rural settings in Nova Scotia**

Annapolis Valley Poverty Coalition



**September
2012**

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The Annapolis Valley Poverty Coalition

The Annapolis Valley Poverty Coalition is an action-focused group that identifies opportunities for change and addresses poverty in rural communities of the Annapolis Valley.

The Coalition's main objectives are:

1. To promote awareness of poverty in the Annapolis Valley;
2. To advocate for policies that address poverty;
3. To pay particular attention to the needs of Annapolis County while acknowledging the current economic climate.

The Coalition is comprised of individuals and organizations concerned with poverty in the Annapolis Valley. We strive for inclusivity and diversity in the composition of membership. The membership consists of:

- Betty Kalt, Chrysalis House;
- Debra E. Reimer, Kids Action Program;
- Heather Howard, Coordinator of Hampers for Health and Advocate;
- Ivy Verhoeckx, The Women's Place Resource Centre;
- Joy Warner, Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women;
- Lisa Garand, Annapolis County Health Board;
- Meaghan Marsters, Healthy Beginnings Home Visiting Program;
- Nancy Stewart, Public Health, Annapolis Valley Health;
- Sarah Hergett, Mental Health and Addictions Services, Annapolis Valley Health;
- Wendy Knowlton, Annapolis County Family Resource Centre.

Executive Summary

This position paper provides policymakers, anti-poverty advocates and others with an overview of the unique and defining factors that contribute to the differences in experiences of poverty for those living in urban and rural settings. Rural poverty has unique causes, impacts and outcomes. To encourage a shared understanding regarding the differences and uniqueness of rural issues, the Annapolis Valley Poverty Coalition wishes to engage local politicians who live in these rural communities in an *open dialogue* that will result in concrete actions meant to address rural poverty in Nova Scotia. To help illustrate the issues, quotes from poverty reduction advocates in the Annapolis Valley are used throughout this paper. Finally, the paper concludes with specific recommendations and policy suggestions regarding poverty reduction for rural areas.

There is not an official measure of poverty in Canada; however, the Low-Income-Cut-Off (LICO) is a widely used tool in this country. Given that most government statistics relate to the LICO measure, this is the measure (definition) that has been chosen for use throughout this paper.

LICO shows separate cut-offs for 7 different family sizes for 5 community sizes.

“Poor” is a relative term. Canadians tend not to measure themselves against third world countries; instead they measure themselves against their neighbours (Taylor, 2009). The most at-risk groups for rural poverty are women, youth, unattached seniors, First Nations and Aboriginal communities, and new immigrants (Burns et al., n.d.). Those most vulnerable face low-wage employment, high unemployment rates, economic insecurity, and are at a higher risk for violence.

Rural settings see an out-migration of people seeking work as traditional rural industries diminish. “Nova Scotia has followed the worldwide trend towards increased urbanization with the Halifax Regional Municipality having the strongest growth (8.3 per cent from 1996 to 2005). Counties within a 90-minute commute to downtown Halifax have shown stable or slight population growth. Eleven counties have experienced declines ranging from 1.7 per cent in Yarmouth County, to 17.2 per cent in Guysborough County” (McNivan et al., 2006, p.3). The costs of this out-migration to rural areas are significant and include reduced services and business closures.

11/18 counties in N.S. experienced population declines.

Lower educational levels and lower literacy levels are more common for rural residents. A lower education achievement for rural students is often due to costs, centralization of educational services and lower expectations regarding rural high school and post-secondary completion.

There are lower incomes and fewer employment opportunities in rural areas. Higher proportions of low-wage jobs, seasonal work and subsequent policies regarding income assistance, the lack of job diversity and limited numbers of professional positions as well as the unavailability of licensed childcare are all contributing factors to this in rural settings.

The distance and costs related to travel are major challenges for rural residents living in poverty. People living in poverty in rural communities have limited resources and are often required to travel further than those in urban areas to purchase much needed supplies or to access resources.

Residents in the most rural areas tend to have the worst health status (Burns et. al, n.d). Barriers to good health in rural areas include low incomes, lack of employment options, the high cost of living, isolation (geographic and social) and lack of transportation. Rural households spend more on food than urban households and more often access food banks (Burns et al., n.d.). Rural individuals living in poverty may find it harder to make their voices heard; they are spread out and therefore lack the numbers required to call attention to issues and anonymity is difficult. People living in poverty may not want to draw attention to their situation. Anti-poverty strategies have garnered modest outcomes, with an increased need to address unequal distribution of resources.



Rural living does have many positive points as well. Benefits to rural living are evident. Rural areas provide an opportunity for a slower community-oriented pace of life. In some cases facing the challenges of out-migration and rural poverty has built resiliency in individuals and communities.

This paper presents the unique causes, contributing factors and particular challenges for those experiencing poverty in rural settings. We will show there is a strong need for separate policies on poverty reduction for rural areas. Universal policies may have negative impacts on rural populations. Universal programs do not always translate into appropriate rural policy goals.

Introduction

Poverty is a harsh reality for people in both urban and rural settings. According to Burns et al (n.d.), urban poverty rates in Nova Scotia are 15.5% while rural poverty is at 15.7 %. The numbers are almost identical, but the *experience* of poverty is different in urban and rural settings. In 2012, the World Health Organization stated, “Globally, poverty has a rural face.” This position paper explores rural poverty by examining the definitions and demographics, including those most vulnerable, the causes and contributing factors, and the experiences of those living in poverty. We will examine poverty as a social determinant of health and its connection with other social determinants. The paper will conclude with recommendations and a request for action.

Nova Scotia’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (2009) states that thousands of Nova Scotians living in rural Nova Scotia experience very different needs from those living in urban areas. Ganong et al (n.d.) states “rural poverty (is) unique and requiring different solutions” (p. 2). The Annapolis Valley Poverty Coalition is located in an area of Nova Scotia that falls entirely within rural definitions. The Coalition aims to engage local politicians living and serving in these rural communities and have these politicians acknowledge the position in which many of their constituents find themselves.

Government policy at the provincial and federal levels tend to be urban focused (Segal, 2006) creating a disparity between rural and urban settings that needs to be addressed. Our rural municipalities have a perfect vantage point from which to present rural poverty issues from a grassroots position to provincial and federal committees. The research has been done. Action is what is needed. The members of the Annapolis Valley Poverty Coalition intend to *open a dialogue* with this paper with the impetus and hope that it will lead to *addressing the particular challenges* faced by those living in poverty in rural Nova Scotia.

Action is what is needed.

Definitions

Rural:

Approximately 6.8 million Canadians, or 20% of Canada's population, are considered to be living in rural areas (Burns et al., n.d). A rural area is defined as having a population of less than 10,000 people and outside of the commuting zone of fifty kilometers of a larger urban centre. For Nova Scotians, this means anyone living outside of the commuting distance of the Halifax Regional Municipality, Cape Breton Regional Municipality and Truro. Amherst with a population of 9717 and New Glasgow with a population of 9562 (<http://www.citypopulation.de/Canada-NovaScotia.html>) come in just under the 10,000 cut off definition for rural areas. This leaves the geographic majority of Nova Scotia (and over 400,000 citizens) in the position of being considered, by accepted definitions, rural.

Poverty:

There is no official measure of poverty in Canada. The *Low Income Cut-Off before tax* (LICO) is a widely accepted measure (Burns et al., n.d.). It is not the only measure of low-income and is not necessarily the most reliable; however, it is the most common measure used by Canadian governments. The LICO is described as “an income cut-off at which people may be said to live in straitened circumstances with insufficient money for basic needs (Best Start Resource Centre, 2010)”. According to the LICO, in 2004 a family of four living in rural Canada whose annual before tax income was under \$26,015 would be considered to be living in poverty (Segal, 2006).

Demographics and Statistics

There are many groups of people at increased risk of poverty. Gender issues play a large role. Women in rural areas not only face a disproportionate level of poverty; they are also at higher risk of violence, economic insecurity and primary industry occupational hazards (Burns et al., n.d.). Aboriginal and senior women are particularly vulnerable (Centres of Excellence for Women's Health, 2004). Those most likely to live in low-income situations are unattached rural seniors - mostly women (Burns et al., n.d.). Demographically, 21% of seniors aged 60 and older live in rural areas compared to 15% who live in urban areas (Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre et al., 2003).

On the other end of the spectrum are youth. Our rural youth face low-wage work, high unemployment rates, high post secondary education costs (rural and urban), and restricted access to income supports (Burns et al., n.d. p.19). Other vulnerable groups include mother-led single parent families, First Nations and Aboriginal people, new immigrants, African Nova Scotians, people with a disability and others (Burns et al., n.d.). Perhaps one of the most vulnerable groups living in poverty are children, as they are affected by the poverty in the homes in which they live.

"While there are certain risk factors associated with poverty, it is important to note that it can happen at any time to anyone. All it takes is one injury, one ill family member or one tragic event, and the most financially secure people can be thrown into poverty." - poverty reduction advocate

Migration

Out-migration has been a long tradition in the Maritimes for those seeking work; this is only expedited during difficult economic times.

Those most likely to leave rural N.S. are youth, young families and those individuals older than 70 years of age (Burns et al., n.d.). Youth tend to move to urban areas (Vanier Institute of the Family, 2010). In fact, rural youth are 30% more likely as urban youth to migrate to places promising more opportunities (Jackson et al, 2007).

Not everyone can simply pick up and leave for urban opportunities. Those most affected by poverty and economic downturns are less able to move to an area with more employment and training opportunities (Segal, 2006).

Immigrants do not usually migrate to rural areas, as they tend to be attracted to urban centres due to language barriers which are more pronounced in rural areas (Annis and Patterson). This means that youth are leaving rural Nova Scotia and the population has few opportunities for growth.

The costs of out-migration are devastating to rural communities. Social and health care services close and businesses suffer and also close (Burns et al., n.d.). For example, between 1986 and 2002 the population of Annapolis County, N.S. decreased by almost 8%; during the same time period Halifax increased its population by almost 20% (Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre, 2003).

“Outmigration of younger people from rural areas can have a large impact in the community, causing a reduction in available services and supports. These changes may erode the sense of place and community that preserves mental health in rural communities” (Latham, 2012, p.10).

Rural youth are 30% more likely than urban youth to migrate out of their home communities.

Health

Rural residents in Canada are more likely to live in poorer socioeconomic conditions, to exhibit less healthy behaviours and to have higher overall mortality rates than other residents (Province of Nova Scotia, 2009). Where an individual lives has a relationship to their level of health and Canadians living in rural areas have poorer health than those living in urban areas (HOC Child and Family Poverty Working Group, 2009). Barriers to good health in rural areas include poverty, the high cost of living, isolation – both geographic and social - and a lack of transportation (Folinsbee et al., 2008).

Health status indicators are inversely related to the degree of rurality or remoteness; in fact, residents in the most rural regions tend to have the worst health status (Standing Senate Committee, 2008). Overall, health lags in rural areas when compared to urban areas and there is evidence of higher death rates and shorter life spans (Kondo, 2006). Poverty, motor vehicle crashes, suicide, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, higher rates of obesity and smoking and less recreational physical activity are all contributing factors (Standing Senate Committee, 2008). Death rates due to injury or poisoning are also higher in rural areas as a result of occupational hazards related to rural industries such as farming, fishing and logging (Standing Senate Committee, 2008).

“What scares me to my core is the idea that children born into poverty – no matter what level of wealth or education they achieve – will have worse health outcomes than their peers. We have to address poverty because trying to fix the effects of poverty may not be possible later.” – poverty reduction advocate

Rural residents are more likely to self-report that they experience health problems (Burns et al., n.d.). This is especially true for those most vulnerable to poverty. Women typically bear the brunt of health-related problems due to the additional stressors found with rural living (Jackson et al, 2007). The impacts of the cycle of poverty, social exclusion, and material disadvantage, low levels of education, unemployment, and underemployment on rural aboriginal people demonstrate that health disparities can also be related to cultural factors (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2009).

Mental health is also more adversely affected as rural dwellers are less likely to contact health professionals for mental health assistance due to major barriers such as stigma, access, specialized assistance, transportation, childcare, and a fear of lack of privacy (Jackson et al., 2007).

“Recent data from the CCHS (2009-2010) suggests that people living in rural environments are less likely to report their own mental health as very good or excellent compared to those living in urban environments in each of the Atlantic Provinces” (Latham, 2012, p.11)

Residents in the most rural areas tend to have the worst health status. Barriers to good health in rural areas include poverty, high cost of living, isolation (both geographic and social) and a lack of transportation.

Access

“Being poor in rural Canada means more than just not having enough. It also means having to travel long distances to get enough” (Annis and Patterson, p.4). Rural people living in poverty may find it hard to make their voices heard since they are geographically isolated and therefore lack the political power to call attention to disadvantaged access issues (Focus Newsletter, 1980). Offering services for the health and wellbeing of residents in rural areas is not financially feasible, so the onus is on the individual to get to the nearest urban centre (Segal, 2006). Decreasing populations mean decreases in health care services in rural areas (Burns et al., n.d.).

Youth have less access to work and social programs in rural areas (Burns et al., n.d.). The cost of travel and distance to access services, extracurricular activities and supports is a challenge for those living in poverty in rural areas (Best Start Resource Centre, 2010). Rural women report more social isolation, less social support and poorer physical and mental health (Jackson et al, 2007). “Impoverished rural women have few options for formal education and training; they may be isolated by community dynamics, geographical distance, and/or lack of transportation” (Burns et al, n.d., p. 23).

Immigrants in rural communities can be especially at risk for poverty because of limited knowledge of available services, supports and information regarding employment opportunities (Burns et al, n.d.).

Barriers to accessing health care services include a lack of services, limited access to family physicians, specialists, mental health services, cost of services (including transportation to specialists) and cultural barriers (Folinsbee et al, 2008). Barriers also impede access to information. There tends to be a lack of knowledge with regard to where to go or what to ask. In addition, information is not in plain language to accommodate low literacy levels (Folinsbee et al, 2008).

Limited access to services impacts education, housing, food security and life expectancies (Burns et al, n.d.). Concentration of political and economic power has moved toward urban centres as they continue to grow. This often means that rural concerns are not heard with the same level of sensitivity as they once were. The net effect is the

loss of rural autonomy (Province of Nova Scotia, 2009). Anti-poverty strategies have had modest outcomes and require more attention towards addressing the unequal distribution of resources (HOC Child and Family Poverty Working Group, 2009).

"It's difficult to encourage the safe handling/storage of food when the necessary equipment is unavailable due to loss of power, temporary or not!" – poverty reduction advocate

Rural people living in poverty may find it harder to make their voices heard since they are geographically isolated and therefore lack the political power to call attention to disadvantaged access issues. Anti-poverty strategies have modest outcomes, and require more attention toward addressing unequal distribution of resources.

Food Security

Rural residents face geographic isolation and higher transportation costs which create additional burdens related to obtaining food (Participatory Action Research and Training Centre, 2011). Residents of rural areas spend more on food and less on shelter (Burns et al., n.d.). It will come as no surprise that items purchased at smaller grocery stores cost more than those purchased at larger grocery stores (Participatory Action Research and Training Centre, 2011). The average monthly cost of purchasing the National Nutritional Food Basket for a family of four costs \$25.77 more on average in rural N.S. than in urban N.S. (Participatory Action Research and Training Centre, 2011). Food costs in Annapolis and Kings Counties, where a great deal of food is grown and produced are second only to Cumberland and Pictou counties as the most expensive in Nova Scotia (Participatory Action Research and Training Centre, 2011). This begs the question, “Why are food prices so high in the Annapolis Valley?”

"It's counter-productive to encourage a more nutritious diet, along with the satisfaction of having prepared it for less cost, when the fridge/freezer and hotplate are not functioning because the power has been turned off." – poverty reduction advocate

More rural households access food banks (Burns et al., n.d.) when compared to urban households. In a recent report, it was shown that the Annapolis Valley area ranked second in food bank use only to Halifax Regional Municipality in Nova Scotia (Food Banks Canada, 2011). Food bank usage is increasingly on its way up across the country, but specifically in rural areas (Segal, 2006). Women in N.S. have the highest incidence of food insecurity of any group or region (Burns et al., n.d.). According to Hunger Count (Food Banks Canada, 2011), over half of the food bank users in rural Nova Scotia are women.

Rural households spend more on food and are more dependent on food banks.

Housing

Housing is defined by Canada's Mortgage and Housing Corporation as "a dwelling that does not require major repairs, is suitable in size and make-up for the family, and costs less than 30% of before-tax household income" (Best Start Resource Centre, 2010). Therefore, if a shelter for a family does not meet these standards, by definition they are experiencing a lack of basic housing needs.

The issue of housing has long been a contentious one between rural and urban poverty reduction advocates. Certainly the cost of housing in central urban areas is increasing. The Vanier Institute of the Family (2010) states that pockets of poverty are now evident in the inner suburbs. The fact that housing needs are an issue when looking at urban poverty is not in question.

Rural residents spend less on housing than their urban counterparts (Burns et al., n.d.); however, rural housing remains an issue in Nova Scotia. When we look at the housing stock in rural areas, there are several areas of concern. Firstly, the rural housing stock is in need of repairs (Burns et al., n.d.). Rural residents are more likely to own their homes but these homes are often inferior in quality (Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre et al., 2003). We see this most often with rural seniors, who are more likely to live in older single-family homes with large properties (Burns et al., n.d.). These homes are often poorly equipped, in need of repair and more expensive to heat and insulate (Burns et al., n.d.). People in rural Nova Scotia end up living in substandard housing, such as in camps in the woods or homes with no electricity or running water (Saulnier, 2009).

A related concern is the cost of house repairs in rural Nova Scotia. It is often more expensive to find services to maintain and repair homes (Burns et al., n.d.). The older a home is, the more expensive the maintenance is (Burns et al., n.d.). With rural seniors, the expensive maintenance costs often come at a time when they are unable to make repairs themselves and are less able to afford to hire someone else to do it properly (Burns et al., n.d.). The result is often that rural residents live in substandard housing in a great amount of disrepair (Saulnier, 2009).

Asked the question to Grade 11 and 12 students, “Where do you see yourself 5 years from now?” Answered:

- *Not in this town;*
- *Not in this province;*
- *At college or university;*
- *Want to see what is outside N.S.;*
- *No money to do anything.*

(Focus groups conducted by the Women’s Place Resource Centre)

A third concern is the lack of housing options in rural Nova Scotia. There are a number of older, larger homes for sale but there is a lack of rural rental units available (Burns et al., n.d.). Burns et al. (n.d.) say that people in rural areas live in inferior conditions, limited by a lack of housing and rental choices. People, often seniors, are forced to move from their home communities due to a lack of affordable and appropriate housing (Saulnier, 2009). The waitlists for public housing are higher in the Annapolis Valley and Halifax Regional Municipality than in any other part of the province (Saulnier, 2009).

Rural Nova Scotians tend to rely on community support to combat homelessness and insufficient residences. There are usually no emergency shelters in rural areas; therefore, those in need of supports and services often migrate to the urban centres (Burns et al., n.d.). In rural areas, “couch surfing” tends to be the short term solution to homelessness (Saulnier, 2009). This means those facing housing deficiencies move from one friend or family member’s home to another to keep a roof over their heads.

Saulnier (2009) puts it very well when she states that homelessness is more visible in urban areas, as those facing this issue in cities tend to be on the streets. In urban centres, the homeless tend to be individuals, whereas in rural areas those facing inadequate housing tend to be entire families or women who have left with children due to domestic conflict and/or violence (Burns et al., n.d.). The result of homelessness being less visible in rural areas is that it is not recognized as an issue. We can see from the research, however, that housing is certainly an issue of concern in rural Nova Scotia and, specifically, the Annapolis Valley.

Rural Nova Scotians face higher costs of home repairs, inferior housing stock, and a lack of housing options.

Income and Employment

There are lower incomes and fewer employment opportunities in rural areas than in urban areas (Burns et al., n.d.). Many factors contribute to this reality, which has, unfortunately, become something of a sad cliché.

There is an abundance of seasonal work in rural areas (Burns et al., n.d.). It is very common to hear that farmers and forestry companies find it difficult to find employees during their busy seasons and while it would be easy to dismiss complaints regarding the lack of workers to simple laziness, there are many barriers and disadvantages to seasonal employment that are not often highlighted. Rural parents may need longer childcare hours during seasonal work, and that childcare may not be available or accessible (Burns et al., n.d.). People who are accessing government programs are completely cut off or have wages clawed back when they start seasonal work and then have a waiting period to access these services again (ESIA Manual, 2012). Seasonal employment has been deemed a low quality employment opportunity and is proven to contribute to poverty (Saulnier, 2009). Further, working in seasonal employment may be even more of a concern with the Employment Insurance reforms being implemented by the federal government in 2012.

"Income can only be stretched so far, and finding other ways to divide the shrinking pot increases stress and ill-health." – poverty reduction advocate

A related factor to the employment/income issue in rural areas is the lack of job diversity available (Ganong et al.). There are a high proportion of low wage jobs, seasonal work, and a limited number of professional positions in rural areas (Burns et al., n.d.). In addition, jobs are less secure in rural areas than in urban areas (Burns et al., n.d.). Rural communities in Nova Scotia rely more on primary industries and the operations that result from those industries (Saulnier, 2009). Table 1 outlines the employment opportunities in rural and urban areas in Canada as of 1999 (Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre et al. 2003). It illustrates that the majority of resource and manufacturing jobs are located in rural Nova Scotia.

Table 1: Employment opportunities in rural and urban areas in Canada as of 1999

	Rural	Urban
Government Jobs	24%	27%
Manufacturing Jobs	15%	5%
Resource (Commodities) Jobs	15%	7%
Commercial Jobs	46%	61%

There has been a downturn in primary industries; reasons for this include government policies around exporting and the current global economic conditions. Primary industries are extremely vulnerable to international trade associated with the commodity economy (Reimer, 2009). There are also policies that arise between nations that encourage purchasing such commodities internally, such as the agricultural policies of the United States and the dispute between our two nations around softwood lumber (Segal, 2006). We have recently seen this in Nova Scotia with the closing of the Bowater Mill on the South Shore and the closing of NewPage Paper Mill in Cape Breton. Both closures have had a devastating effect on the rural Nova Scotia economy.

The demise of primary sector employment has had a dramatic impact on rural communities (Jackson et al., 2007). A single mill closure has a devastating impact on a single industry community (Annis & Patterson). More people in rural areas are turning to self-employment and are not making enough to rise above the low income cut off (Burns et al., n.d.). Farmers are increasingly seeking off-farm work (Annis & Patterson). In fact, less than 3% of the workforce in rural Canada has an agricultural occupation and less than 3% of Canadians live on a census farm (Segal, 2006). This will have a significant impact on the future of food production and food security.

The demise of primary sector employment will have a significant impact on the future of food production and food security.

Those who remain employed in primary industries are paid lower wages, which leads to economic instability (Burns et al., n.d.). The lack of industry does not seem to be the fault of any rural municipality. There are many barriers to industries setting up in rural areas, including inadequate availability of licensed childcare facilities, lack of public transportation and lack of information technology training (Ganong et al.).

In his presentation to the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry Pong (2007) states that income disparities in Canada are shifting from a provincial to a rural-urban divide. Across Canada, urban women earn 16% more than rural women (Burns et al., n.d.). In addition, rural men earn 25% more than rural women across Canada (Burns et al., n.d.). When examining particular population groups such as Aboriginal people and women, we see lower incomes than other rural population groups across Canada (Burns et al., n.d.).

The incomes in rural Nova Scotia are among the lowest in Canada (Burns et al., n.d.); 14% of men and 24% of women who worked full time the entire year earned less than \$20,000 in Nova Scotia (Vanier Institute, 2010). Further, the income gap between rural and urban Nova Scotia is one of the largest in Canada (Saulnier, 2009). Table 2 illustrates the differences between income in the Annapolis Valley and Halifax in 2000 (Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre et al, 2003). Looking at the percentage of individuals who earn more than \$40,000 a year, it is quite evident that there is a significant urban/rural divide in this province.

Table 2: Income in the Annapolis Valley and Halifax in 2000

	Annapolis Valley	Halifax
Under \$5,000	14.3%	11.3%
\$5,000 - \$10,000	13.7%	11.7%
\$10,000 - \$20,000	26.6%	21.6%
\$20,000 - \$30,000	16.5%	16.2%
\$30,000 - \$40,000	10.8%	12.5%
\$40,000+	18%	26.6%

The rural working poor work more hours than the urban working poor, have more work experience, and are much more likely to be self-employed (Fortin, 2008). It is not clear if being self-employed is a factor in “causing” low income or if the lack of employment opportunities means that more working poor are operating small businesses as an alternative (Fortin, 2008) to unemployment or out-migration. When looking at individuals accessing government assistance programs, statistics show that 66% of income assistance recipients live in rural Nova Scotia. There are serious health risks attached to these numbers; research shows links between rural and urban income disparity and smoking and obesity (Jackson et al., 2007).

Rural women face specific barriers to earning sufficient incomes and finding long-term employment.

A contributing factor to lower incomes and higher unemployment rates for rural Nova Scotians is the lack of social supports in place; this is particularly true regarding child- and elder care. Nova Scotia is one of only three provinces that require women in receipt of income assistance to take training programs or work when a child turns one year of age (Burns et al., n.d.). All other provinces allow women the option of waiting until a child is school age (Burns et al., n.d.). The majority of caregiving for both children and the elderly falls on rural women (Jackson et al., 2007). When combined with the fact that women engage in three times the amount of unpaid housework as men, the stress and balance of the rural family suffers (Jackson et al., 2007). For rural women who are self-employed, this translates to double the work because their time spent in economic activities is not diminished as a result of their unpaid work at home (Annis & Patterson). Women in rural Nova Scotia earn only 81% of that of rural men for equal work (Jackson et al., 2007). It is no wonder that rural women report more isolation, less social support, and poorer physical and mental health (Jackson et al., 2007).

Transportation

Rural transportation has been described as Canada's forgotten issue (Segal, 2006). Best Start Resource Centre (2010) says the distance and cost of travel to access services, extracurricular activities and supports is a major challenge for people living in poverty in rural areas. Given the extra distances required to access resources, it is understandable that transportation accounts for a larger portion of spending for rural households than for urban households (Burns et al., n.d.).

Transportation can be a major issue for seniors as a group; however, it appears to be more significant for rural seniors. One quarter of rural seniors in Atlantic Canada do not own a car or have access to a private vehicle (Burns et al., n.d.). Because there is a lack of public transportation in many rural areas, seniors who can no longer drive have difficulty keeping appointments such as medical appointments and experience problems accessing resources (Segal, 2006).

Transportation also negatively affects youth in rural Nova Scotia. School bus transportation is more expensive (Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre et al, 2003); due to the expenses incurred, school buses cannot be flexible or provide services at times that enable children to participate in after school or before school activities in rural areas (Segal, 2006). The distance students in rural areas must travel between home and school are often daunting, which means less access to extracurricular activities and homework support (Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre et al, 2003).

Transportation is a major barrier to employment opportunities. As well, Segal (2006) points out that the investment in rural roads has not kept pace with the importance rural economy places on them for agriculture, tourism and resource industries. Lack of public transportation can be a barrier to industry development in rural areas (Burns et al., n.d.). The result is out-migration to urban centres or commutes from rural to urban areas for employment opportunities. In fact, 35% of rural residents now commute to larger urban centres for their employment (Vanier Institute, 2010).

Transportation accounts for a larger portion of spending for rural households than urban households.

Education

Rural residents tend to have lower education levels and literacy levels (Burns et al., n.d.). In 2001, 23% of people aged 20 to 34 living in rural areas had less than a high school education when compared to 14% of the same demographic in urban areas (Annis & Patterson). Table 3 outlines the levels of education in rural and urban areas of Nova Scotia as of 2001 (Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre, 2003).

Table 3: Levels of education in rural and urban areas of NS as of 2001

	Rural	Urban
Less than High School	41%	25%
High School	9%	7%
Post Secondary (not university)	42%	50%
University +	9%	18%

Why is there such a discrepancy in the educational achievement of rural and urban students? One reason may be the cost of post-secondary education (Burns et al., n.d.). Rural areas tend to provide lower returns on educational investments, so the question becomes, “why spend the money to continue an academic career?” (Burns et al., n.d.). If a student plans to remain in a rural area, there are very limited numbers of jobs available to skilled workers; therefore, the individual is less likely to find employment in his or her home community upon completion of a degree (Burns et al., n.d.). There is also less variety of classes available to rural students. Larger public schools are more likely to have classes taught by specialized teachers and to offer a wider variety of programs for students such as drama, art and music (Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre, 2003).

Rural students in Nova Scotia do not go to university because of rising tuition costs, the centralization of educational services, the high cost associated with leaving a rural area and the expansion of low-waged, low-skilled work in the rural economy (Burns et al., n.d.). The result is that in 2001, only 79% of rural students in Nova Scotia expected to obtain university educations versus college educations, while 88% of urban students were expecting to pursue a university education (Burns et al., n.d.).

Question was asked to Grade 11 and 12 girls, “What would make you want to live in rural Nova Scotia?” Answers were:

- *More opportunities for youth: jobs, recreation, programs, trips, women doctors. There is no money to do anything.*
- *Better education – hard to get into classes you want, need courses for university that are not offered at this high school, have to do courses through correspondence, which are not free until grade 12.*

(Focus group facilitated by the Women’s Place Resource Centre)

Rural youth are less likely to invest in post-secondary education than urban youth.

Benefits to Rural Living / Resiliency

Why would anyone chose to live in rural Nova Scotia with all these challenges? Are our rural areas worth saving? The answer from rural residents is a resounding “yes!” Rural areas provide an opportunity for another way of living: one that values a slow, friendly and community-oriented pace of life in harmony with the natural environment (Beaton, 2008). Rural areas are viewed as a crucial part of the national economy; this is where vast agricultural, mineral, forestry, fisheries and energy wealth that pulse through the urban centres are produced (Beaton, 2008). Rural areas play a vital role in ecological sustainability (Beaton, 2008). There are differences in a rural community’s resource base, socio-cultural make up, and service and commercial sectors in relationship to urban centres. In some instances there is an identified interest in living in rural areas for the tourism, residential properties, and lifestyle values (Jackson et al., 2007).

There is acknowledged safety in rural areas in the context of close knit relationships in the community (Segal, 2006). Rural living can provide a protective factor which is evident with low-income rural individuals who exhibit stronger ties to family and friends who assist in times of need (Participatory Action Research and Training Centre, 2011).

Benefits to rural living are evident. Rural areas provide an option for a slower, community oriented pace of life. In some cases resulting rural change has been identified with building resiliency in individuals and communities.

Recommendations

We have briefly outlined some of the issues regarding rural poverty in Nova Scotia, including some causes and contributing factors and particular challenges for those experiencing poverty in rural settings. The Annapolis Valley Poverty Coalition recommends the following actions be taken to begin to address these issues:

Provincial Government

- Decentralize government services (Segal, 2006). It is seen as positive step that some departmental positions are being relocated into more rural areas across the province. This committee is hopeful that this trend will continue with provincial departments and that it will be adopted by federal departments as well.

Provincial and Municipal Governments in Partnership

- Recognize that “universal policies to combat low incomes may have different impacts on rural and urban populations” (Fortin, 2008, p.10) and develop separate policies with regard to the individual issues identified in each;
- Acknowledge and address systematic and structural racism;
- Move from a crisis management model of housing to programs that create sustainable housing for those most at risk of becoming homeless;
- Initiate and develop policies that address poverty, housing, literacy, and other social determinants of health in rural areas.

Municipal Governments

- Conduct community-based research around what is working and the resiliency shown by rural communities in the face of economic disparity;

Increase local services and strengthen communities by sharing best practices between rural areas.

Conclusion

The Annapolis Valley Poverty Coalition has attempted to paint a clear and compelling picture of rural poverty, including some of the causes and contributing factors, vulnerable populations and the unique challenges presented for those experiencing poverty in rural settings. The issues of poverty have been well researched with resulting recommendations regarding how to address and solve rural poverty in Canada. Those applicable to rural Nova Scotia are referenced in this paper. Rural poverty is unique; therefore, the solutions must also be distinctive. We ask the municipalities to acknowledge this and begin to hold meetings to strategize and create policies to address rural poverty.

We end our position paper with the words of Brian Beaton in the Senate report entitled *Beyond Freefall: Halting Rural Poverty*: “How well we weather these difficult times will depend largely on the resilience of rural Canadians. And they have been dangerously neglected. It is time to give something back to those who have made our country strong” (Beaton, 2008).

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