

THE IMPACT OF ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION ON THE LIVES OF RURAL WOMEN

“Having a vehicle is an unfortunate necessity of living in a rural community”

(Survey respondent)

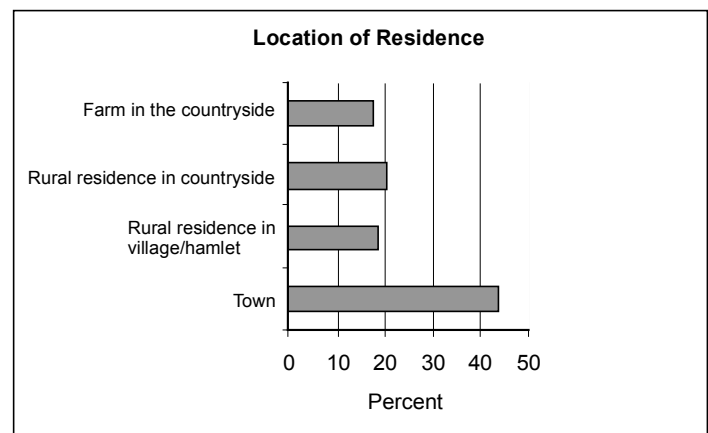
THE LACK OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The research* examined the role of transportation on the lives of rural women. The lack of public transportation in rural areas of Ontario means that the task of getting around to fulfill the responsibilities of work, household provisioning and raising children falls directly on women and highlights the importance of their access to a motor vehicle. In this research, women who have regular access to a motor vehicle are considered to be ‘transportation normal’, those that have poor (intermittent) and no access are considered to be ‘transportation poor’.

THE SURVEY

Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire survey divided between an on-line method (65%) and a direct method (group interviews). Later, personal interviews were conducted with a small number of ‘transportation poor’ women to obtain in-depth impressions of the impact of poor transportation on their lives. In total, 170 invitations to answer the survey were distributed in S. Ontario. Of these 105 were returned and 98 were used for the analysis.

Chart 1: Type of Residential Setting (All respondents)



WOMEN RESPONDENTS

Women from all walks of rural life answered the survey. The women sampled came from a wide range of age groups and held very different jobs. Thirty-four percent had no job at all. Respondent women lived in

a variety of rural and small town settings (see Table One). Where they lived made a difference to how easily they got around.

3. SELECTED FINDINGS ABOUT WOMEN AND TRANSPORTATION

We found that 65% women have normal access to a motor vehicle, meaning that **35% are ‘transportation poor’**. This is considered high and represents a severe problem for many rural women and those who depend upon them for getting around. It has implications for employment and the accessibility of many services in rural Ontario.

In order to describe Transportation Poor women, their general characteristics were compared with the group of women who were considered to be Transportation Normal.

The five indicators that were selected to compare the two groups include two measures of income, education and whether there were people in the household who had vehicles as well as driver’s licenses.

Table 1: Employment Income

<i>Employment Income</i>	<i>Transportation Normal (%)</i>	<i>Transportation Poor (%)</i>
Yes	84%	41%
No	16%	59%

*Eighty-five percent of women with **normal** access to a vehicle have employment income, while only fifteen percent of women with **poor** vehicle access had employment income. Furthermore, 44% of women with poor access to transportation have incomes less than \$10,000. These findings suggest a strong link between Income, employment and access to transportation.*

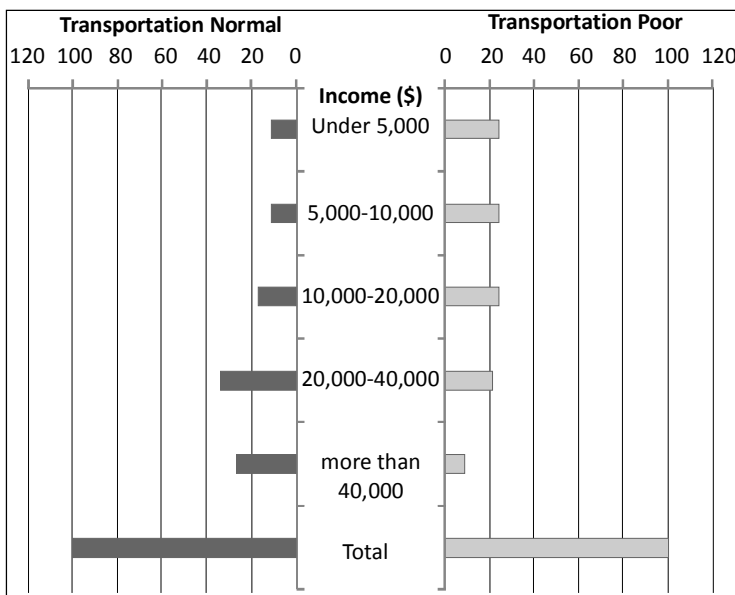


Chart 2: Personal Income and Transportation

We learned that access to a vehicle has two dimensions. There are

women who have their own vehicle and enough income to keep the vehicle operational at all times. Some women, however, don't hold a driver's license and others are too elderly or infirm to be driving. In this case access to a vehicle implies being in a household where other members have vehicles, drivers licenses and enough income to maintain them. Such people however, may **NOT** always be available or willing to drive another household member around. This may be referred to as intermittent access and is a sub-condition within the range of transportation problems faced by many rural women.

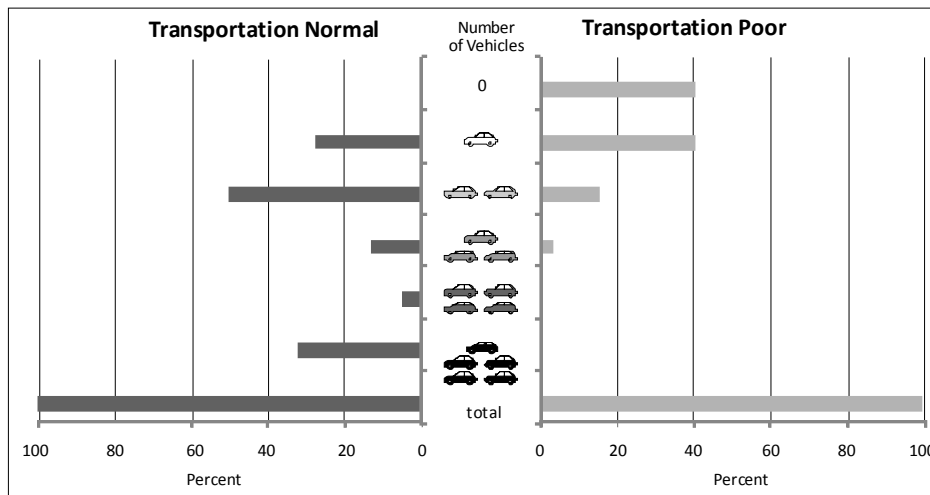
Table 2: Women and Driver's Licenses

It is noticeable that 53% of women who are Transportation Poor (low access to a vehicle) do not have a driver's License.

Driver's License	Transportation Normal		Transportation Poor	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	61	98.39	15	46.88
No	1	1.61	17	53.13
Total	62	100	32	100

Over seventy percent of Transportation Normal women have two cars in the household, whereas 40% of poor transportation women have NO vehicle in the household at all.

Chart 3: Number of Vehicles in Household



Not surprisingly, 94% of women who are Transportation **Poor** reported that it was inconvenient. However, 35% of those with High Access to transportation also reported that it was inconvenient. What this may reflect is the high stress levels experienced by some women who have the responsibility of

driving everyone in the household to meet their everyday needs, while using a vehicle regularly to maintain a job or to sustain a business etc.

4. WHAT WE LEARNED FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

When we talked to rural women one-on-one and analyzed the views expressed at the end of the formal survey, we learned that low access to transportation affects the lives of women in many different ways.

Women with dependants were particularly affected. Those with children found it hard to get their children to the same activities that other children enjoyed. Households with seniors had constant problems of getting to the services that were required. Many women were unable to keep low paying jobs because the transportation and child care costs were too high. Two women did not go to job-skills training because they could not get to the training center on a regular basis. Most women in single-car households found that their transportation needs were considered secondary to those of working partners. Several women had cars, but they were not in use as they could not afford the repairs or the insurance/license costs etc. Almost all respondents commented on how poor winter driving conditions was a deterrent to keeping up with job and household responsibilities.

All in all, the quality of women's lives in rural areas is bound up in transportation access of one sort or another. Few women used taxis, and the occasional inter-city bus was hard to get to and was reported to be highly inconvenient.

Contact Us

If you have something to say about these findings and the rural transportation issue, and/or would like to attend a policy discussion group under the Rural Women Making Change Program, please contact us at your earliest convenience. If you would like to talk with a researcher contact Dr Tony Fuller (tfuller@uoguelph.ca, 519 824-4120 ext.56783); Dr Susan Turner at susantur@uoguelph.ca (519 824-4120 ext.58027) or Siobhan O'Leary at olearys@uoguelph.ca.

WE WOULD BE HAPPY TO HEAR FROM YOU!

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WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT WOMEN AND THE TRANSPORTATION SITUATION IN RURAL ONTARIO?

For those women without full access to transportation in their daily lives, the situation is quite serious. For those women with full access to transportation, their lives are also complex as there are few options but to maintain access to a motor vehicle at all times and whatever cost. The first issue therefore is the lack of an alternative, that is the absence of public transportation in most rural areas of Ontario.

OPTION ONE: PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

There are many problems with the provision and use of public transportation in rural areas. Primarily, the distances between settlements are large and the populations in each settlement are thought to be too small to justify and maintain a public transportation service. The love affair with the automobile, the assumed dominance of journey to work by men, who prefer cars to buses, are well known trends in North America generally. Local bus services are difficult for the private sector to provide without some public investment and rider guarantees. Local people themselves are often reluctant to use public services given that they are not always comfortable or convenient in terms of times and frequencies. There is also a stigma attached to taking a van or a bus.

Nevertheless, local bus services and more frequent inter-city buses should be an option for Ontario rural residents if we are all to benefit from a fully engaged rural society and an environmentally efficient use of space. The environmental problems attributable to single car ownership, and rides with one individual at the wheel, are mounting and as they reach public consciousness the debate about public transportation is already being opened. Evidence of travel patterns for work, essential services and recreation for families would be very powerful as a means of supporting a marketing plan for local bus services in many rural areas. 'Local' in this context means the natural interconnections between small communities for services, work and recreation.

OPTION TWO: LOCAL OPTIONS

There are many transportation schemes and services that have been put in place in rural communities across North America and some of these may be worth considering for adaptation to situations in rural Ontario. Some are selected for discussion here and at forthcoming policy discussion group sessions with rural women and service providers.

COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION:

Different versions of community transportation arise out of the different needs, assets and funding arrangements in a community. The Province of Nova Scotia funds community transport research, operations and capital costs for rural areas. Communities design the service to meet the needs in their community. Many of these services link up to provide a regional service to low income, elderly and

disabled service users. Some of the systems are operated as a taxi-bus service and will come to your door or selected destination when called in advance to arrange a service. Others run on a regular route throughout the day. The services are determined by local need and are required to be accessible. In some instances services that were provided for one group i.e. seniors, have expanded to meet new transit needs within the community that were not being addressed.

TRANS-CAB SERVICE:

Some municipal systems operate a trans-cab service for residents who live outside of the regular transit route. Passenger's call for a taxi to pick them up from their home and the taxi drops them off at the appropriate bus stop for their trip. There is often a surcharge for this service.

In Ontario, Bancroft Community Transportation is operated by donations from various provincial and local organizations and businesses. They provide a service to all able-bodied adults and children within the local area and to neighbouring cities. The fare is calculated based on distance and volunteer drivers are essential to making the service function and affordable. Social assistance recipients often have their rides paid for by the agency they are registered with.

COMMUNITY CAR SHARE:

Best used in towns with a larger population base, community car shares provide access to a vehicle when needed by a member. Cars are picked up in a central location and are loaned on an hourly or by day basis. The level of need is a primary determinate of a successful car share as is the availability of other alternatives. Rural areas in the UK have started car shares, however their rural areas are more densely populated than in most of rural Canada.

OPTION THREE: LOW INCOME CAR LOANS

This is an option that has been used by Ways to Work Inc. across the US. The organization provides low interest loans to low income (mainly women) residents in both urban and rural areas. The loans are between \$2,500-\$4,000 US and are usually paid within two years. The program was launched to assist low income families in finding employment beyond their immediate local area. Often this employment is more lucrative than that which is found locally and the participants have had few problem in repaying their loan. Evaluation of the program indicates that most of the participants have experienced an improvement in quality of life that car ownership allows.

In any discussion about providing local transportation with motor vehicles there is the growing concern regarding the environment and the contribution that motor vehicles make to global warming. In reviewing these options it would be an imperative to select those options that make greater use of existing vehicles or provide bus-van type services that actually reduce the number of vehicles on the road, or consolidates trips, and which use low emission fuels. The challenge is not only to provide transportation options, but to provide them in an environmentally acceptable way.