

# The View From Here:

## Perspectives on Northern and Rural Psychology

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### Message From the Chair

#### CPA Convention 2011—Toronto

It was wonderful to reconnect with many of you during the CPA Convention in Toronto in June. Each year I look forward to meeting our members and hearing about all the wonderful work that's being done across the country in the area of rural and northern psychology. I continue to be impressed with the growing momentum of our section and the dedication of our members.

At the 2011 convention we hosted three poster sessions, a conversation session and our annual general meeting. We received submissions for the poster category of the North Star Student Award but did not receive any for the oral presentation category. Given this situation and the high caliber of the poster submissions received, we elected to offer two awards in the poster category. I am pleased to announce the following recipients of the North Star Award:



Laura Armstrong, University of Ottawa, (co-author Ian Manion) for her poster presentation entitled *Communities at Risk: Factors that Predict Elevated Suicide Ideation in Rural Youth*.



Shelley Goodwin, Fielding Graduate University, for her poster presentation entitled *M-CHAT and PDDST-2 as Predictors of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Young Children Living in Rural Canada*.

Laura and Shelley were presented with their awards during our annual general meeting. I encourage you to read the summaries of these poster presentations included in the current newsletter. Congratulations Laura and Shelley!

Consistent with previous years, we did not reach quorum at our annual general meeting (AGM). The nine section members who attended the AGM did, however, bring up some excellent points for discussion. We continue to explore ways of enhancing regular communication amongst our members, improving our convention program, and increasing member participation during the annual CPA convention.

## Message From the Chair Cont.

The section is sensitive to the fact that travel costs may prohibit some members from traveling to the annual convention and we continue to explore the use of technology as assisting in this regard. Aimee Suprenant, CPA Board Representative, was also present for a portion of our AGM and requested any feedback the section had to the CPA Board. Thanks to everyone who was able to attend and provide their input.

### Executive Committee Update

I am pleased to announce that Rebecca Wells is our new Student Representation by acclamation. Rebecca is a Ph.D. student in Clinical Psychology at the University of Waterloo. She has completed her pre-doctoral residency in the Rural and Northern Psychology Programme in the Dept. of Clinical Health Psychology at the University of Manitoba and is presently completing an optional second year specialty residency in rural psychology at that same site. Her 1 year term began immediately following the AGM in June 2011. As our Student Representative Rebecca will have full voting privileges and assume the following responsibilities:

- a) Represent the interests of psychology students as they relate to the ongoing initiatives of the section.
- b) Be an active participant in the section's decision making process, paying particular attention to voicing the needs of the student members.
- c) Write the student column in the section newsletter, liaison with the Student Section, and be actively involved in the coordination of the North Star Student Award.

I want to sincerely thank Laura Armstrong for her contributions as our past Student Representative and wish her all the best in her future endeavors.

Unfortunately we did not have any eligible section members express an interest in the Executive Committee vacancies. As such, I will continue in my role as Section Chair. Rebecca Wells (Student Rep), Judi Malone (Secretary/Treasurer), and my term positions will officially end in June 2012. Please consider putting your name forth for one of the Executive Committee Vacancies.

### Upcoming Section Activities to Watch For:

The section is actively working towards securing two invited speakers for the upcoming CPA Convention in Halifax. We will keep you posted on our progress.

CPA has kindly offered the expertise of a web developer to interested sections and we have accepted this offer. Please give some thought to ways we might improve our current website. A notice will be sent out to members requesting input on this.

As a means of encouraging networking amongst our members, the section is planning to host a reception at the upcoming CPA Convention. We will keep you posted on the details and hope you will be able to join us.

Karen Dyck, Ph.D., C. Psych.  
Rural and Northern Psychology Section Chair



## **Communities at Risk: Factors that Predict Elevated Suicide Ideation in Rural Youth**

**Submitted by Laura Armstrong**

Rural lifestyles are often romanticized as idyllic and stress-free, but recent evidence is emerging to the contrary. In fact, modern rural youth are four to six times more likely to die by suicide than their urban peers. *What can explain elevated suicide rates for rural youth?*

There are often significant mental health service gaps in rural communities in Canada, with fewer services available for rural than urban youth. Rural youth also indicate more concerns than do urban youth about privacy and confidentiality. Concerns about confidentiality are one of the primary barriers to service access and open dialogue with professionals. Therefore, not only are there fewer mental health services in rural communities, but rural youth are also less likely to access these services than urban youth. Given this, there is a particular need for research to stimulate the development of youth suicide prevention programs in rural communities before suicidal thoughts and mental health concerns emerge.

The development of prevention approaches involves an examination of risk and protective factors. There is less opportunity for social interaction and greater perceived isolation in rural by comparison to urban regions. Social isolation is a key predictor of suicidal ideation. Rural youth also have more stress and coping difficulties than urban youth. Difficulties coping are predictive of risk behaviours and suicidal ideation, while good active coping is associated with high perceived social support. Moreover, rural youth are at greater risk than urban youth for health-harming risk behaviours. Risk behaviours are associated with suicidal ideation. Rurality itself is also a predictor of suicide and, therefore, may also be predictive of suicidal thoughts. Little research to date has examined rural and urban differences in suicidal ideation and predictors of rural youth suicidal ideation for prevention purposes.

We carried out a study of 813 rural and urban secondary school youth in Eastern Ontario. Rural youth all lived within two hours of a city centre in mixed farm/town communities. Urban youth lived in a major metropolitan city.

Rural youth reported significantly more suicidal ideation than did urban youth ( $p < .001$ ), with rural female youth indicating the highest rates. In a “best fit” structural equation model, rural dwelling predicted significantly poorer coping with daily stressors, lower perceived social support, and more risk behaviours than urban dwelling ( $p < .05$ ). All of these factors in turn predicted suicidal ideation.

This study was one of the first to assess factors that mediate the relationship between rural living and youth suicide ideation. Our research suggests that prevention approaches for rural youth suicidal thoughts might appropriately include 1) teaching positive coping for day to day stressors, 2) engaging youth in activities that foster social support, and 3) addressing health-harming risk behaviours (e.g., drug and alcohol use, smoking, unhealthy sexual and eating practices, and glue or aerosol sniffing). However, it should be noted that findings of this study may be limited by self-report and its cross-sectional design – necessary precursors to more costly interventional or longitudinal research. With consideration of these limitations, our research suggests factors that may allow for the development of rural-targeted suicide prevention approaches that could be implemented before suicidal thoughts emerge.

## **M-CHAT & PDDST-2 as Predictors of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Young Children Living in Rural Canada**

**Submitted by Shelley Goodwin**

The validation study examined the predictive validity of two commonly used Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) screening instruments, namely the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT; Robins, Fein, Barton, & Green, 2001) and the Pervasive Developmental Disorder Screening Test (2nd edition) (PDDST-2; Siegel, 2004), for indicating a diagnosis of ASD on the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS; Lord, Rutter, & DiLavore, 1998) and a final clinical diagnosis. The focus of the study was children between the ages of 18 months and 6 years of age in three rural Nova Scotia health districts. Using archival data from 148 participants, the study answered the question of does the PDDST-2 and M-CHAT predict a diagnosis on the Autism Spectrum as measured by the ADOS in a rural Canadian Population. The rural population being studied was contained in three health districts in Western Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia has a population of 913, 462 according to the 2006 Statistics Canada Census. Furthermore according to this Census, 45% of Nova Scotians live rurally.

Receiver Operating Characteristic curve analysis (ROC) was used to evaluate the predictive validity of the two screening instruments. The results of the study indicated that sensitivity was adequate but specificity was significantly reduced for each screening instrument separately and if results were combined specificity was increased but the sensitivity was decreased.

It is commonly suggested that when screening for ASDs, sensitivity should be considered more important than specificity, as those who are identified as needing further assessment on a screening instrument but who are not diagnosed with an ASD frequently are diagnosed with another developmental disorder, such as a language disorder or a global developmental delay (Eaves et al., 2006; Pandy et al, 2008). This suggests that identification of children with developmental concerns is more important than identifying a child with a specific disorder such as ASD. The results of this study support the use of the M-CHAT if using only one instrument for screening. The M-CHAT, which had a slightly better sensitivity and specificity rating compared to the PDDST-2, may produce more reliable results in this population.

### **References**

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## Student Section

Submitted by Rebecca Wells

Hi! I'm the new Student Representative for the Rural and Northern Psychology Section. One of the responsibilities for this position is to write this very column with the objective being to write about something that would be of interest to fellow student members. Although this might seem like a relatively simple task, I'm not sure what might be of interest to all of you! After pondering this question for a few weeks, asking colleagues for topic suggestions, and looking back through the previous newsletter issues, I still had no ideas. In the end I decided that the best way to find out what might be of interest to you would be to ask you. So, if you have any thoughts on what you might like to see in this column, please send me your suggestions (rwells@sbgh.mb.ca)! Unfortunately, asking for your ideas does not help with a topic for the column for this issue, so I've decided to use the space in this issue to introduce myself and tell you about my training journey so far.

My training in psychology started accidentally when I enrolled in Introduction to Psychology as an elective for my Bachelor of Accounting degree. At the same time I was working part-time for a community association and was hearing stories from families about the difficulties and frustrations they were experiencing in finding mental health services in their area, particularly those living in rural communities. When my elective course was over I realized I wasn't ready to be done with psychology. I found the subject fascinating and felt that I would be better able to 'make a difference' for the families I had been working with if I had a background in psychology rather than accounting. So, I transferred my program of study to the Faculty of Arts.



At the beginning of the final year of my BA(Hons) degree program, I began to contemplate what I would do once I graduated. I really had no idea what sort of job I would be able to get with my degree or where/when I should start looking for work, so I sought advice from others. That's when the idea of graduate school entered the picture. As a single parent, I had never seriously considered the possibility as I assumed it would be too much work and require too many sacrifices. After spending some time thinking about my options, I realized my education wasn't complete (and, if I'm completely honest, I was a bit leery about moving out of the 'student' role). I still wasn't sure I could manage the demands of parenting and graduate school, but I thought that it couldn't hurt to apply (aside from what I'd heard about those nasty rejections). I had a number of interests at the time, so I applied to programs in different areas of study (i.e., developmental, neuro, social, and clinical). I really didn't think I had a preference of where I wanted to go (i.e., school or specialty), until the acceptance letters came in. At first I struggled with the choice: did I want to move my child out of our 'home'?; did I want to move away from family and all my supports?; would I enjoy the research I would be able to participate in at this school?; would this supervisor be the best

## Student Section Cont.

fit for me? The decision seemed to get harder with each new offer until I got the one that I didn't even realize I'd been holding out for. And with that, the decision was made.

Although I was excited to have the opportunity to continue my education in Clinical Psychology, the transition wasn't easy. During my undergraduate studies I'd had the luxury of having family and friends nearby. My daughter was able to spend time with them when I was working to meet a deadline or had to spend time on campus in the evening. Now we were 400 km away from everyone we knew and I was finding it challenging to keep up with my work in addition to parenting without support. It took some time, and some sacrifices, but I finally managed to find some work/life balance.

Then it came time for internship. Although I had begun thinking early on in my studies that I wanted to become a rural psychologist, there were no opportunities in my graduate training to participate in rural practice. I knew that one Canadian program offered training in rural psychology specifically; however, there were a lot of applicants and only 2 positions. There were some other Canadian sites that offered opportunities for rural experiences, but again, they were limited in numbers. Although I hoped to get some rural experience in my internship year, my broader focus became matching to a site that offered generalist training. I applied to every program in Canada that I felt offered enough diversity that I would get the training I needed to be comfortable in pursuing a career in rural psychology. I was surprised at the number of programs I was able to apply to and impressed with the enthusiasm they expressed for my rural career goals.

In the end I was thrilled to match to the Rural Stream of the Pre-doctoral Residency in Clinical Psychology at the University of Manitoba. Again, the transition was not easy. My now teenage daughter was not willing to move to another province for a year while I completed my training. Yes, I could have forced her to make the move, and likely would have if not for my parents allowing her to stay with them for the year. So, I moved to Manitoba on my own and began my residency. Aside from being so far from my child, it has been the best year of my training so far. I found that I really enjoyed going to work each day. That's not to say that it wasn't challenging, it was. It was also exhausting and overwhelming at times, but I never felt that I'd made the wrong choice. Being able to experience rural psychology in practice only deepened my commitment to pursuing it as a career.

As the final few months of internship approached, I again started to wonder what I would do once this experience was over. Unfortunately, I had run into some difficulties in the data collection for my dissertation, so I wasn't in a position to begin applying for jobs. I had enjoyed my experience during residency and felt that I had learned a great deal, but there was much more to learn (again, being honest, not quite ready to move out of the 'student' role). Fortunately, I was permitted to apply for the postdoctoral Residency Training Programme in Rural Psychology at the University of Manitoba. After some negotiation with my daughter, she agreed to make the move to Manitoba (I wouldn't have been able to stay away for another year). So, I am now in my second year of residency training. Although many things are the same this year (office, supervisor, etc.) some things have also changed. I have more autonomy, I have more confidence in my ability, and I am finally ready to move out of the 'student' role (as soon as that dissertation is done!)

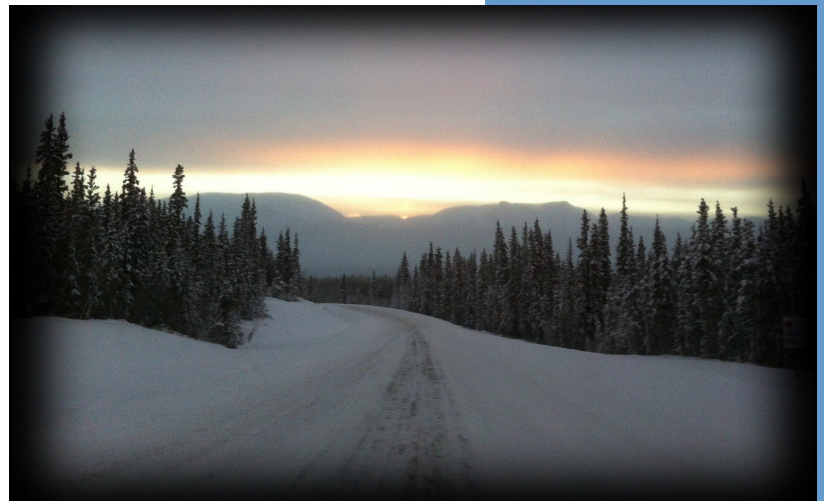


## **A Week in the Life of a Rural/Northern Psychologist in Training**

**Submitted by Crystal Rollings**

As a master's of psychology student attending a small, northern university, living off-campus and out of city limits I consider myself fortunate to experience a taste of both city and rural life. Recently, I was given the opportunity to experience psychology research in a remote, northern area, an opportunity that challenged my self-proclaimed rural experience.

My adventure began with several flights that sent me all over the province and even across a border, followed by a long drive heading back towards my starting point. With a full day required to travel to and from my destination, my three days of data collection easily turned into a five-day excursion. The drive was very solitary, with only 10 other vehicles spotted on the roads. The scenery was absolutely breathtaking with beautiful snow covered mountains and semi frozen lakes. The winding, dipping, icy roads assumed no need for guardrails and appeared to head further and further into the unknown. Finally, after driving into the once distant mountains, I arrived at my destination.



It didn't take long before I discovered why places such as this are popular for people that want to get away from busy, flashy, noisy city life. In my hotel room I found a flat screen television complete with rabbit ears and one fuzzy channel, an alarm clock, dresser, table, bed, and bathroom...but no phone. Good thing I had my cell phone on hand in order to let people know that I had arrived at my destination...but, oh, no cell service for miles. Am I in the twilight zone? Fortunately, my room was close enough to the hotel office that I was able to connect to their wireless Internet, making my computer my only connection to the outside world. Before my arrival the hotel manager informed me that the two community stores and one restaurant were only open for a few hours each day, so I also arrived in town with a stockpile of food just in case I wasn't free during their open hours. A past visitor had also forewarned me that the town shuts down their power generator at 9 pm meaning complete isolation from the outside world. As the time approached I patiently waited for complete darkness, just like in the movies. The power remained on, however, the town itself did appear to shut down and complete silence ensued. It was strange and serene at the same time.

The people in the community were very friendly and also very curious about the new person in town. The friendly nature made it very easy to strike up conversations, get to know each other, and find out more about the community; like when and where I should go during my visit. It might also have helped that most conversations were struck at the local pubs, which were the only places open past 6 pm. I found it interesting that during my one-week visit I became familiar with

## **A Week in the Life of a Rural/Northern Psychologist in Training Cont.**

more people in this community than I have in my own neighborhood where I have resided for over 3 years. I also found it interesting to learn that although this community was distanced from any large centers, I was still surrounded by people that owned something from Apple, played video games, and had amazing computer application skills. I also learned that in this community there is no lack of exceptional creative talent and skills such as music, art, and graphic design.

One of the benefits of being in this community was that no matter where you went everyone talked or waved at you along the way. Since there was limited traffic to deter wildlife, I found this very reassuring. At least someone would know when and where the bear drug me off because without any reception my normally dependable iPhone (and its location tracking capabilities) clearly wasn't going to be of any help in this matter. Even as I trudged my way through a flash blizzard every vehicle that passed by offered me a ride and every pedestrian shared a quick, albeit cold and snowy, conversation. This also came in handy when I discovered that my outside world (i.e., the Internet) was completely useless in helping me find where my research was to take place. The road that was listed was a road that did not even exist. So after walking around town, wandering into a few wrong buildings, and with the assistance of locals I managed to make my way to my destination. When arriving at the office where my research took place I was always greeted by warm, smiling faces and welcome conversation. It did not take long to feel like you were a welcome addition to the office. The office was very much like other offices that I have visited, with the exception of an open-door policy of helping yourself to find where, what, or who you need. Being such a small community also meant that if someone couldn't make their appointment then everyone in the building knew and schedules were immediately rearranged to accommodate everyone. The challenges of working and living in such a remote community were evident but were equally countered by the benefits.

I found myself a bit sad leaving the community and stopped on several occasions in order to take just one last picture of the beauty and simplicity that cannot be matched by any city. Overall, the experience was a wonderful, refreshing experience that challenged my knowledge of myself and my (mis) conceptions about rural life. Would I do it again? Yes, in a heartbeat! I am very grateful to have had this opportunity. I highly recommend that others seriously consider opportunities in small communities, as the experience can be mutually beneficial.





## Ethics in the Rural Context

**Submitted by Judi Malone**

Psychologists become 'participant/observers' in the local culture, which allows the psychologist to view the reciprocal influence of the psychologist on the community and the community on the psychologist.  
(Behnke, 2008a, p.45)

*This standing feature on professional ethics is where we collectively share our stories from Canadian rural practice through vignettes and reflections that demonstrate challenges, rewards, & ethical dilemmas. We have explored boundaries, privacy, generalist practice, & collaboration. This 5<sup>th</sup> installment is a reflection on integrity.*

### Integrity in the Community Context

The suggestion that rural psychologists keep an extremely low profile in the community is likely to contradict culturally relevant practice (Helbok, 2003). Many rural practitioners have experienced community pressure or had concerns about how they were perceived by the community. Consider the following vignette:

You have been away for work often lately and promised to spend the day volunteering with your teenaged child at a local community event. You hear someone pointing out how you are the local psychologist. An individual approaches you and publically implores you to provide a community seminar on handling anorexic children. A small group gathers to agree with the suggestion and to hear your answer. You are not trained in the area of eating disorders.

Community expectations are a significant consideration for rural psychologists (Schank & Skovholt, 2006) particularly as ethical action always takes place within a community and impacts more than just the psychologist and client (Austin, 2007). There is often an assumption that rural psychologists will take the role of expert and leader in community development (Gale & Deprez, 2003; Schank & Skovholt, 2006). This may pressure a rural psychologist to work in a community psychology role or to work beyond the limits of their competence.

Integrity in relationships is a particularly salient issue in the cultural context of embedded environments where overlapping relationships are more common. The *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (CPA, 2000) directs psychologists to act in the best interest of community members and to foster public trust in the discipline of psychology. Think about the earlier vignette. How would you handle the situation? Perhaps you share the need to balance community expectations with your own needs and with client needs (Roberts, Warner, & Hammond, 2005).

## Ethics in the Rural Context Cont.

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### Current Dilemma – What Issues Arise for You?

*I am looking for your ideas, stories, humour, & wisdom on ethics in professional psychological practice in rural Canada for this column. What ethical dilemmas do you experience? I will be editing Ethics in the Rural Context but we will be writing this column together. Give me your ideas or write a column! Judi Malone, R. Psych., [judim@athabascau.ca](mailto:judim@athabascau.ca), 780-645-8214.*



## Recent Publications

**Chomienne, M., Grenier, J., Gaboury, I., Hogg, W., Ritchie, P., Farmanolva-Haynes, E. (2011). Family doctors and psychologists working together: Doctors' and patients' perspectives. *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice*, 17, 282-287. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2753.2010.01437.x**

This evaluation of one urban and one rural collaborative care practice showed that having a psychologist on site was highly satisfactory for patients and physicians, and resulted in improved patient care and outcomes, and reduced costs.

**Hardy, C.L., Kelly, K.D., & Voaklander, D. (2011). Does rural residence limit access to mental health services? *Rural and Remote Health*, 11, 1766 (online). Available: <http://www.rrh.org.au>.**

This article uses Statistics Canada's Canadian Community Health Survey on Mental Health & Well-being to find out whether rural living limits access to mental health services.

**Journal of Pediatric Psychology Special Issue on Rural Health Issues in Pediatric Psychology, Volume 36, No. 6, July 2011.**

The articles in this special issue are by American authors but many of the issues discussed are relevant in Canada, such as concerns about obesity, health behaviours, and social-emotional difficulties in childhood and adolescence.

**Malone, J.L. (2011). Professional practice out of the urban context: Defining Canadian rural psychology. *Canadian Psychology*, 52, 289-295. doi: 10.1037/a0024157**

This article provides a working definition of rural professional practice of psychology in Canada.

**Malone, J.L & Dyck, K.G. (2011). Professional ethics in rural and northern Canadian psychology. *Canadian Psychology*, 52, 206-214. doi: 10.1037/a0024505**

The authors discuss ethical issues arising in rural and northern professional practice of psychology in Canada.

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The Newsletter is produced by the Rural and Northern Section of the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) and is distributed to members of the Section. The purpose of the Rural and Northern Section is to support and enhance the practice of rural and northern psychology. The goals of the section are: 1) Establish a network of professionals interested in the areas of rural and northern psychology (this may include individuals currently practicing in rural/northern areas of those with an interest in this area), 2) Enhance professional connectedness by facilitating linkages between rural and northern practitioners, 3) Distribute information relevant to the practice of rural and northern psychology, 4) Provide a forum to discuss practice issues unique to this specialty, and 5) Introduce students and new or interested psychologists to rural and northern practice.

This issue of the Newsletter was edited by Karen Dyck and Cindy Hardy. Many thanks are extended to Crystal Rollings for her invaluable contributions to design and layout.

The opinions expressed in this newsletter are strictly those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Canadian Psychological Association, its officers, directors, or employees.

All submissions are reproduced as submitted by the author(s).

### **Call for Submissions**

The Newsletter Editors invite submission of articles and items of general interest to rural and northern psychologists. Faculty and students are encouraged to send submissions for the next newsletter to Karen Dyck, [dyckkg@ms.umanitoba.ca](mailto:dyckkg@ms.umanitoba.ca). We also welcome submissions of photos of rural life and settings.