

A Review of
Woman Abuse in Rural Places
by Walter S. DeKeseredy

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Abstract

This review critically examines *Woman Abuse in Rural Places* by Walter S. DeKeseredy, highlighting its significant contribution to the study of violence against women in rural contexts. The book systematically explores the multidimensional nature of woman abuse, engaging with theoretical, empirical, and activist perspectives. DeKeseredy challenges gender-neutral terminology, advocating for a gender-specific approach that foregrounds the political and institutional dynamics sustaining violence against women. Notably, the book expands the established conceptual frameworks to include crimes of the powerful, corporate, governmental, and state violence, thus situating interpersonal violence within broader structural and institutional harm. The analysis extends to globalisation and resource extraction as drivers of vulnerability and integrates survivor narratives with policy recommendations. While the book offers conceptual clarity and actionable insights, this review identifies limitations in its engagement with intersectionality and women's agency, suggesting that a more sustained integration of these perspectives would further strengthen the analysis. Nonetheless, DeKeseredy's work provides a robust framework for understanding and addressing woman abuse in rural places, offering valuable guidance for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike.

Keywords: rural criminology; feminist criminology; violence against women; continuum of woman abuse; crimes of the powerful

Violence against women is widely recognised as a global social issue and has become the subject of increasing international research. Much of the existing literature, however, has tended to overlook the specific circumstances and challenges present in rural settings. Early foundational work by Gagne (1992) and Websdale (1998) opened the way for focused social scientific investigation into violence against women in rural settings. Since their pioneering contributions, there has been a marked expansion of research in this area, particularly over the past fifteen years, with both theoretical and empirical studies growing in number and depth. Walter S. DeKeseredy's *Woman Abuse in Rural Places* emerges as a significant and timely contribution to this expanding body of scholarship.

The book, organised into five chapters, examines the multidimensional nature of violence against women in rural places by systematically engaging with theory, research, and activist perspectives. The opening chapter clarifies the book's central concepts, "rural" and "woman abuse", by addressing relevant definitional and conceptual debates. Building on his earlier work with Joseph Donnermeyer and others (DeKeseredy et al., 2007; Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014), DeKeseredy (p. 6) proposes "a nominal conceptualisation of rural" that highlights four common features of rural areas. Additionally, DeKeseredy challenges definitions that minimise the political nature of violence against women. He clearly grounds his analysis in feminist politics, arguing against gender-neutral terminology, such as *intimate partner violence*, in contexts where violence is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women. DeKeseredy, therefore, employs the gender-specific term *woman abuse* to underscore the gendered power relations and male-dominated institutions that sustain this violence, insisting that naming these dynamics explicitly is essential for addressing them.

Woman Abuse in Rural Places offers significant scholarly contributions to the study of violence against women in rural contexts, including DeKeseredy's expanded version of Kelly's (1988) *continuum of sexual violence*. DeKeseredy redefines it as a *continuum of woman abuse*, including crimes of the powerful, such as corporate, government, and state-government violence against women. By expanding the continuum to encompass crimes of the powerful, DeKeseredy shifts the focus from solely interpersonal violence to the broader structural and institutional forces that harm women. This constitutes another key contribution of the book, situating woman abuse within the wider institutional and structural harm.

DeKeseredy extends the focus beyond interpersonal abuse to examine state, corporate, and institutional violence that disproportionately harms *rural* women, including economic exploitation, environmental degradation, reproductive control, and institutional neglect. Drawing on decades of research on violence against women, feminist theory, and rural criminology, he demonstrates that the vulnerabilities of women living in rural areas are not merely interpersonal but deeply rooted in broader structural power relations. The book's dedicated chapter on *crimes of the powerful* underscores this argument, showing how the interests of corporations, political leaders, and local elites shape rural economies and systems of governance, often with harmful consequences for women. By extending the analysis of woman abuse beyond the private sphere, this chapter provides a crucial conceptual bridge between patriarchy and political economy. In doing so, DeKeseredy significantly advances

sociological and criminological understandings by bringing violence against women scholarship into dialogue with critical state-corporate crime perspectives.

Another compelling aspect of the book is its attention to globalisation and natural resource extraction as drivers of woman abuse in rural places. DeKeseredy illustrates how global economic pressures, such as resource-based development, industrial expansion, and associated labour migrations, reshape rural areas in ways that heighten women's vulnerability to violence. In this sense, the book opens a significant direction for expanding violence against women in rural places beyond interpersonal violence to include global capitalism, environmental governance, and rural development policy as integral components of understanding abuse.

A further strength of *Woman Abuse in Rural Places* is its effective bridging of empirical research, survivor narratives, and concrete policy recommendations. Throughout the text, DeKeseredy draws on decades of theoretical development and empirical research while incorporating vivid narrative accounts that reveal how entrenched gun cultures, economic dependence, and the hyper-visibility of rural life constrain women's options for safety. These survivor voices not only add emotional and empirical depth but also ground the book's analysis of how rural places are gendered and continuously policed. Significantly, DeKeseredy links these insights to a set of clear, actionable policy proposals, including enhanced criminal justice training, strengthened local service networks, improved recognition of coercive control, and educational initiatives addressing patriarchal norms, even though implementation challenges will vary significantly across national and regional contexts.

Alongside these contributions, a further area for development concerns the integration of intersectionality. Given that *Woman Abuse in Rural Places* is conceived as a synthetic and theoretically driven review of existing scholarship, its engagement with intersectionality is understandably constrained. DeKeseredy acknowledges that factors such as race, ethnicity, disability, migration status, sexuality, age, and class shape women's experiences of abuse, yet these intersections are not explored in depth. A more sustained integration of intersectional perspectives would further strengthen the book's analytical reach. Nonetheless, the book's conceptual clarity and its theorisation of woman abuse in rural places provide a strong and generative framework within which more nuanced intersectional scholarship can continue to develop.

While the book offers a persuasive critique of institutional complicity and structural power in rural contexts, greater emphasis on women's agency would further strengthen the analysis. As a necessarily selective synthesis of existing literature, the discussion gives limited attention to how rural women actively navigate and resist harm through safety strategies, collective solidarity, community advocacy, and engagement with informal support networks. Bringing these dimensions more fully into view would complement the book's structural focus, highlighting rural spaces not only as sites of constraint but also as contexts in which women exercise agency and develop alternative forms of safety and support.

Overall, DeKeseredy offers a compelling framework for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to address woman abuse in rural contexts by effectively integrating theoretical perspectives with empirical research. *Woman Abuse in Rural Places* provides a clear and coherent account of the complexities of woman abuse in rural places, emphasising the need to examine both interpersonal dynamics and broader structural conditions. The book stands out as a valuable reference for those committed to developing more context-sensitive and feminist-informed responses to violence against women. It provides readers with analytical tools and practical insights that can inform future research, policy development, and intervention strategies grounded in the lived realities of women in rural places.

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