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A Primer For Understanding Issues Around Rural Poverty

By

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A Primer for Understanding Issues Around Rural Poverty

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A Primer for Understanding Issues Around Rural Poverty

About this Report

Poverty remains an important, but complex and challenging research, policy, and lived world issue. In northern BC, communities have been exposed to mounting pressures stemming from the economic recession, fluctuating commodity prices, poor conditions on Aboriginal reserves, the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic, the mobility of capital, and labour restructuring. This has led to renewed concerns about poverty rates and support services. At the national level, growing interest in rural poverty emerged with the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry's recent report documenting rural experiences with poverty. Despite these renewed interests, there is no national poverty strategy, and little research has explored the complex underpinnings of rural poverty. As the processes and pathway experiences of poverty can vary from place to place, rural poverty will require its own set of flexible policy responses.

The purpose of this primer is two-fold. The first part of this primer explores economic and social restructuring processes that have affected resource-based communities, as well as how opportunities and challenges to address poverty has been conditioned by the unique characteristics and capacity of local people, relationships, infrastructure, and institutions of rural and small town places. Large distances and low population densities across rural areas limit opportunities to search for and commute to employment, and have resulted in limited access to infrastructure, services, and other resources – thereby prolonging unemployment and potentially the duration of poverty in rural and small town places. At the same time, while local governments lack resources and will power to make poverty a priority issue, senior government policies continue to inadequately reflect the unique context, challenges, and experiences of living in poverty in rural and small town places.

The second part of this primer collates information about measuring and executing qualitative research methodological approaches for rural poverty. Based on our review, we suggest that urban-biased measures of poverty do not reflect the needs or limited infrastructure and services available in rural and small town places, nor do they reflect how new spatial relationships and geographies that have emerged in a restructured neoliberal policy environment shape the lived experience of rural poverty. Furthermore, due to the complex and sensitive nature of rural poverty, more engaged, personal, and flexible approaches to conduct research on rural poverty need to be adopted.

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Part One: A Literature Review of Rural Poverty

1.10 Introduction

Poverty remains an important, but challenging research, policy, and lived world issue. In Canada, most research on poverty has been focused in urban areas (Bunting *et al.* 2004; Canadian Council on Social Development 2007; Hajnal 1995; Lee 2000; Reutter *et al.* 2006). Our knowledge about the dynamics, experiences, and complex underpinnings of rural poverty across a diverse rural landscape is more limited (Finnie and Sweetman 2003; Standing Senate Committee and Agriculture and Forestry 2008). In fact, Fortin (2008: 1) argues that “one needs to go back to the early 1970s to find other studies on low income in rural Canada”. This review seeks to direct attention to this important issue in this under-researched context.

Over the past 30 years, job losses associated with industrial and economic restructuring has resulted in higher rates of unemployment, exacerbated household stress, and has produced many different forms of poverty. These impacts are especially important in single-industry economies and those places located at a distance from major urban centres. Unstable labour markets have resulted in considerable mobility and migration as residents search for employment and training opportunities. At the same time that rural and small town places have experienced economic and social restructuring, services have become increasingly regionalized and processes to access supports have been streamlined and mechanized. Constant changes to this complex service environment and economy can condition the potential opportunities or barriers to escape poverty (Brown and Warner 1991). Previous studies on poverty suggest that the processes and pathway experiences of poverty across various communities can be quite different despite similar levels of low-income (Clapham 2003; Crump 2002).

The purpose of this literature review is to explore how opportunities and challenges to address poverty can be conditioned by the unique attributes or constraints of rural and small town places. We begin with a review of how the meaning of rural and small town places and poverty have been construed, debated, and used as such meanings provide a basis for responses to rural poverty at the local, provincial, and national levels. The pressures and impacts of economic and social restructuring on resource-based rural and small town places, including the impacts on the capacity of households and organizations, are then explored. This includes a description of the socio-economic characteristics of the rural poor, as well as a review of the coping strategies that may be used in these places. Such coping strategies may also be influenced by the social constructs and attitudes towards poverty within a place. By understanding the context of place in a restructured environment, we are then able to provide a ‘rural lens’ to debate the appropriateness of organizational structures, policies, programs, and other initiatives that are deployed to respond to the needs of those living in rural poverty.

1.20 Definitions

1.21 Rural and Small Town Places

While different perceptions and definitions of rural and small town places can have important implications for policies and approaches to addressing poverty, the meaning and definition of rural and small town places is largely contested (du Plessis *et al.* 2004). These differences reflect the unique circumstances and geographies of specific regions and countries, as well as the different motivations and mandates of organizations who are formulating their own definition of these places (Desjardins *et al.* 2002). Small places may be characterized by different demographics, relationships, land-use, geographic and population size, densities, location, and even proximity and exposure to metropolitan influences (Cloke 1994; Gill 1990; Government of Québec 2001; Halseth 1998; Halseth and Sullivan 2000; Rambeau and Todd 2000). It will be important to keep these characteristics in mind as they condition the different challenges and opportunities that will impact the types of approaches that are deployed to address poverty. For our study purposes, we have chosen to use Statistics Canada's definition of rural and small town places which includes places under 10,000 people (McLaren 2002; Statistics Canada 2001).

1.22 Poverty

The meaning and definition of poverty is equally varied and contested. Researchers have explored an array of approaches to defining poverty, and evaluating the program and policy implications which flow from these (Fitchen 1992; Milbourne and Cloke 2006). Material and social deprivation, for example, are two long standing components linked to poverty (Commins 2004). Material deprivation can be through hunger, a lack of income, inadequate and unsafe living conditions, insufficient home heating, low car ownership levels, and a lack of education (Haynes and Gale 2000). However, previous research has criticized such approaches for their focus solely on limited financial or material resources (Vera-Toscano *et al.* 2001). Building upon material deprivation, social deprivation is an important part of the lived experience of poverty and stems from the social exclusion from networks that can impact access to supports and resources (Raphael 2007). Social deprivation also encompasses the inability to exert influence over decision-making that impact one's quality of life. With a higher standard of living in countries like Canada, the UK, Australia, and the United States, concepts like 'relative poverty' have also been introduced and linked to social resource access standards for diet, mobility, and education, and have been juxtaposed with notions like 'absolute poverty' that focus on an inability to meet basic needs like shelter and food (Osberg 2000). Duration has also become an important dimension of defining poverty as those who experience poverty for five or more years are defined as chronically poor (Thorp *et al.* 2005).

1.23 Rural Poverty

Rural researchers have expanded our understanding of poverty by adding nuances that are specific to how poverty is lived and experienced in rural and small town places. Blank (2005) suggests, for example, that rural poverty is different than urban poverty due to the isolated nature of many small communities, the different opportunities and challenges that are presented within rural economies, and the unique social norms present in these areas. Driven by rural idyll images

and an absence of welfare supports, rural poverty tends to be more 'hidden' (Commins 2004; Milbourne 2010; Sherman 2006). Marginalized households also tend not to be clustered together (Woods 2005).

1.24 Homelessness

Similar to the concepts of 'rural' and 'poverty', definitions of 'homelessness' have also varied and have been influenced by underlying motivations and priorities by researchers, public policy makers, service providers, and interest groups. Some researchers have arbitrarily imposed an age restriction of 18 years of age on homelessness (Toro *et al.* 1999), thereby ignoring vulnerable youth populations who become homeless after fleeing violent or unstable living circumstances at home. In the policy arena, Jacobs *et al.* (1999: 11) note that,

The definition of homelessness in Britain has changed over the last 30 years as vested interests have struggled to impose their particular interpretation of policy debates and to push the homelessness issue as they define it either higher up or lower down the policy agenda.

Yet the way in which such concepts are defined can have important implications for determining who is eligible for support provided by public, private, or non-profit organizations. Early approaches to defining homelessness focused upon individuals who had no fixed, regular address or inhabited a space that was not designed as a sleeping accommodation (Geisler and George 2006; Johnsen *et al.* 2005). In the United States, for example, the McKinney Act (1987) defined homelessness for programs that receive government funding as:

An individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence; an individual who has a primary night-time residency that is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodation (e.g. welfare hotels and transitional housing for the mentally ill), or an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized...or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human being (O'Connell 2003: 162).

Such notions of homelessness include rough sleeping in spaces such as streets, barns, garages, vehicles, bus shelters, or train stations (Robinson 2006). It excludes, however, people who are living in overcrowded or substandard spaces (Geisler and George 2006). In response, a growing body of literature has used the concept of at-risk homelessness. People who are defined as at-risk of being homeless typically live in unstable housing conditions, which may include temporary living situations, couch surfing, hostels, cheap motels, and others (Bruce 2003). Beavis *et al.* (1997) further build upon previous definitions of homelessness by adding duration as an important dimension. For example, there are those who are 'chronically' homeless for extended periods of time; those who 'episodically' homeless, such as prostitutes or runaways who may periodically gain access to shelter; and those who are defined as 'situational' homelessness, such as those who temporarily lose shelter due to a crisis such as divorce or eviction.

1.25 Rural Homelessness

Researchers have questioned the relevance and applicability of existing definitions of homelessness to the contexts of smaller places. Most notably, due to the cold winters and limited social infrastructure, it is rare to find homeless individuals concentrated in soup kitchens, drop-in centres, and shelters that typically do not exist in rural and small town places (Aron 2006; Beavis *et al.* 1997; Cloke *et al.* 2001a, 2007; Johnsen *et al.* 2005). Instead, Milbourne and Cloke (2006) suggest that the rural homeless tend to be dispersed across unstable or ‘hidden’ forms of shelter in both built and natural environments.

Rural advocates have called for an expanding definition of homelessness to include individuals who are forced to live with relatives or friends, those who remain in abusive relationships in order to avoid homelessness, or those who live in overcrowded households, in bed and breakfasts or other accommodations that are not deemed suitable for long-term occupation, and in abandoned homes (Anderson and Christian 2003; Fitchen 1992; Woods 2005).

1.30 The Restructuring of Resource-Based Rural and Small Town Places

Most research related to poverty is focused upon urban centres. Over the past decade, however, researchers have attempted to draw more attention to the unique context and diverse landscapes of rural poverty (Milbourne 2010) – a context and landscape that will require its own set of flexible policy responses. The limited attention that has been paid to rural poverty in Canada may be linked to the longstanding image of the rural idyll. There is also a perception that many resource industry towns have traditionally offered high paying jobs and have organized union labour in forestry, mining, and oil and gas (Freudenburg and Gramling 1994; Nord 1994). As a result of restructuring, however, there are fewer high paying jobs in these rural economies that are no longer dominated by the resource sector. At the same time, poverty has also emerged in rural and small town places experiencing rapid growth. Several researchers have identified residents who have not benefitted from high paying jobs in booming oil and gas towns and where low paying jobs in the secondary and tertiary service sectors can produce poverty amongst the working poor (Brabant and Gramling 1997; Tickamyer and Duncan 1990; Tolbert 2006). Women, for example, continue to be disadvantaged by gender discrimination within resource industry occupations (Reed 1999, 2003; Snyder and McLaughlin 2004). At the same time, the increased demand for workers in booming oil and gas towns has increased housing prices and the overall cost of living, has led to an overwhelming demand and hence reduced access to services and infrastructure, and has strained transportation infrastructure (Goldenberg *et al.* 2010; McLeod and Hovorka 2008; Storey and Jones 2003). Researchers have also drawn attention to high poverty rates that can exist in more northern and remote rural areas due to the high costs of living (Bramley *et al.* 2000; Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning 2007; Huskey *et al.* 2004). The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how rural restructuring has produced many pockets of poverty across a very diverse rural landscape.

Fitchen (1991) completed one of the most comprehensive portraits of rural poverty through her research in upstate New York. She examined the impacts of economic losses and restructuring, demographic change, and persistent and multi-generational poverty. Through mechanization and technology changes, resource industries have long adopted labour shedding strategies in order to

improve their economic competitiveness (Commins 2004; Levernier *et al.* 2000). The acceleration of these trends after the economic recession of the early 1980s reduced large shares of low-skilled jobs and increased the demand for skilled, professionalized, and specialized labour (Brown and Warner 1991; Green 2005; O'Hagan and Cecil 2007; Tickamyer and Duncan 1990). Economic restructuring has also been accompanied by significant changes in labour allocation, including a replacement of permanent, full-time jobs with consultants, casual, short-term, or contracted labour (Holmlund and Storrie 2002; Klein *et al.* 2008; Misra *et al.* 2006; Warner and Hefetz 2003). This adoption of a 'flexible accumulation' mode of production has been in response to increasing global competition from low cost production regions, fluctuating commodity prices, environmental debates and conflicts, the increasing mobility of capital, exhaustion of resources, changes in fibre supply, and the emergence of competing industries and products (Hayter 2003; Prudham 2008).

Due to a number of challenges and disadvantages, northern resource dependent communities can become traps for persistent poverty (Partridge and Rickman 2007). Small communities that become 'unseen grounds' may find it difficult to attract capital for initiatives associated with the new rural economy (Lawson *et al.* 2010), and unsettled Aboriginal land claims can also discourage new investment (Geisler and George 2006). This undermines their ability to acquire sufficient resources to invest in infrastructure or the diversification of their economies (Nord 1994). Due to the dispersed nature of resources, small communities also rarely benefit from value-added, economic agglomeration, or complimentary cluster activity as higher order equipment and supply activities tend to be in larger centres (Blank 2005; Freudenburg and Gramling 1994). For example, equipment used in farming and forestry is rarely manufactured in resource towns (Nord 1994). As resources, equipment, and capital are controlled by corporate offices in distant urban locations, communities and residents often have no control over their future (Nord 1994). Economic restructuring has not only driven industry consolidation and closures, but also means that boom and bust cycles in rural and small town places are becoming more severe (Markey *et al.* 2008). Together, these challenges and disadvantages increase the likelihood of sudden job losses and limit long-run opportunities for those with limited skills or education.

Economic restructuring has affected rural residents in different ways than their urban counterparts. Some researchers suggest that rural residents are more likely to enter and remain in poverty compared to their urban counterparts (Finnie and Sweetman 2003; Jacob *et al.* 1997; Rural Welfare Policy Panel 1999; Sherman 2006). As manufacturing jobs in various resource sectors have declined, lower paying service sector jobs have been on the rise (Blank 2005; Levernier *et al.* 2000; Tickamyer and Duncan 1990). Commonly based upon part-time work with low wages and limited or no benefits, service sector jobs, frequently occupied by women, have not enabled families to maintain their standard of living or sustain existing household expenses (Brown and Lichter 2004; Sherman 2006; Wells 2002; Woods 2005).

Some research has highlighted that women may be more susceptible to industrial restructuring or technological change. For example, Reed (1997) found women are more likely to lose jobs due to plant restructuring. They also take greater pay cuts than men and experience longer terms of unemployment. Neitzert *et al.* (1999) also found that the highest shares of permanent layoffs were in construction, manufacturing, consumer service, retail trade, and public administration –

the last three being significant employers for women. In contrast, however, other researchers have argued that new employment opportunities emerging in rural and small town places are being directed more towards women (Little 2002). Citing studies from the European Union, Brush (1999) argues that restructuring has created long-term unemployment for men, while more than 80% of new jobs created since 1961 have been filled by women due to their greater flexibility and willingness to work in temporary situations.

With less seniority and experience, youth are also amongst the first to be laid off and frequently experience prolonged periods of unemployment (Bessant 2002; Canadian Apprenticeship Forum 2004; Elgar *et al.* 2003). Labour restructuring has also meant that there is limited new job growth, resulting in fewer employment opportunities for youth to take up local employment as their parents had done (Clapham 2003; Hanlon and Halseth 2005). While older laid-off workers are likely to benefit from special employment and training programs, less attention has been paid to rural youth who have yet to enter the labour market (Behrisch *et al.* 2002/2003).

With large distances and lower population densities, labour restructuring trends can be very difficult on households in rural and small town places that have fewer employment options and more limited access to a range of social services, and may result in prolonged periods of unemployment (Blank 2005; Commins 2004; Davis *et al.* 2003). While several researchers have suggested that most cases of rural poverty are experienced for a short period of time (Anderson and Christian 2003; Finnie and Sweetman 2003), re-entry into the workforce may only partially explain these trends in rural and small town places. It is likely that these trends are also impacted by the out-migration or export of unemployment to other places. Yet, as Fitchen (1995,1994) argues, those with the least amount of education and job skills tend to remain while other more mobile households migrate to urban centres for a wider range of service, housing, and employment options (Aron 2006; Cloke *et al.* 2000c). Urban-to-rural migration can also increase levels of rural poverty as people moving to rural areas tend to be older, poorer, less educated, and less connected to the labour force. Over time, there is a net population loss from rural areas and a net loss of human capital leading to an increased demand for support services (Foulkes and Newbold 2008).

1.31 Service Restructuring

As the pressures and impacts of restructuring increase, local supports in rural and small town places for dealing with these pressures and consequences are decreasing. Since the 1980s, urban-based models and neo-liberal policies aimed at reducing government expenditures have downsized, closed, or regionalized service supports (Fraser *et al.* 2005; Halseth and Ryser 2006, 2007; Hanlon *et al.* 2007; Liu *et al.* 2001). This has left unemployed or 'at-risk' residents in small places without adequate support to respond or cope with restructuring pressures, develop new skills, or pursue new employment options (Konkin *et al.* 2004). Such changes can have profound impacts on low income residents who may not have access to transportation, and who may live in small, resource dependent towns with few alternative employment options (Brabant and Gramling 1997; Robinson 1990). Some research suggests that service restructuring has not only reduced levels of services and supports, but has also perpetuated rural decline (Milbourne 2010).

The restructuring of rural and small town services has offloaded responsibilities to an overburdened voluntary sector. Not only are community supports and voluntary organizations already struggling with limited human resources to address the complex problems associated with poverty (Johnsen *et al.* 2005), but these groups also tend to be less organized, may only have use of aging and unsuitable infrastructure, and may not have sufficient resources to provide adequate training, leading to different / conflicting approaches and unstable or inconsistent provision of services (Cloke *et al.* 2000c, 2007; Johnsen *et al.* 2005; O'Connell 2003). In some cases, facilities have closed due to the inability of staff to meet the complex needs of their clients who may be struggling with abuse, drug and alcohol addictions, and mental health issues (Cloke *et al.* 2007). In addition, government programs for community support programs and housing initiatives continue to be oversubscribed and underfunded (Evans 1998). With limited capability to pursue a range of funding sources, there is a heavy reliance on donations which can lead to local rivalry in the competition for limited funds (Cheshire and Lawrence 2005). At present, policy research has focused only on traditional supports such as health care and employment insurance and thus there is a need to explore the impacts and implications of a wider set of supports and programs (Gundersen 2006; Jones 2008; Simpson and Buckland 2009).

1.40 The Dynamics of Rural Poverty

1.41 Characteristics

Significant work has already explored the characteristics of people at greater risk for living in rural poverty (Butler and DePoy 1996; Cloke *et al.* 2001b; Kobetz *et al.* 2003; Pleace and Quilgars 2003; Snyder *et al.* 2006; Woods 2005). Previous research has argued that the rural poor share many similar characteristics of those living in poverty in urban areas (Bruce 2007; Finnie and Sweetman 2003). Aboriginals, women, unattached or single individuals, single parents, especially female-headed and grandmother-headed households, those with lower levels of education, those with mental and health disabilities, and those with drug and alcohol addictions are more likely to be living in poverty in rural and small town places (Anderson and Christian 2003; Beavis *et al.* 1997; Bruce 2006; Dore and Kulshreshtha 2003; Finnie and Sweetman 2003; Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning 2007; Osberg 2000; Porterfield 2001; Salamon and MacTavish 2006; Snyder and McLaughlin 2004; Snyder *et al.* 2006; Tickamyer and Duncan 1990; Vera-Toscano *et al.* 2001; Wells 2002). In Canada, rural residents who were unable to speak the official languages (English or French) were more likely to be living in poverty, suggesting that more language programs are needed in rural and small town places (Chokie and Partridge 2008). Lichter and Johnson (2007) and Slack and Jensen (2002) further suggest that rural minorities, such as African Americans and Hispanics, have demonstrated higher rates of underemployment and poverty in rural areas. Places that have greater youth and old age dependency ratios were also more likely to experience higher poverty rates (Levernier *et al.* 2000; Phimister *et al.* 2000). Previous studies also suggest that poverty is increasingly becoming common for rural senior women living alone (National Advisory Council on Aging 2005; Shucksmith and Chapman 1998; Sylvestre *et al.* 2006). People with institutional backgrounds, experience with foster care, service in the military, or experience in prisons were also more likely to experience poverty (Anderson and Christian 2003; Beavis *et al.* 1997; Pleace and Quilgars 2003).

Despite these similarities, there are some key socio-demographic differences between the rural and urban poor. For example, the rural poor are more likely to be working, self-employed, between the ages of 35 and 44, Caucasian, and less likely to be receiving government benefits (Aron 2006; Bruce 2003; Rural Welfare Policy Panel 1999; Snyder and McLaughlin 2004; Tickamyer and Duncan 1990; Wells 2002). Fortin (2008) further adds that rural workers living in poverty are older and work more hours than their urban counterparts. Those who work in farming occupations are also more likely to be poor in rural areas (Tickamyer and Duncan 1990).

Furthermore, Brabant and Gramling (1997) suggests that a new group of poor has been emerging in rural and small town places. This consists of unemployed workers who formerly had high paying jobs either in middle management or labour positions, high levels of education, and large mortgages. After becoming accustomed to periods of shut-down, strikes, and temporary lay-offs, as well as seasonal periods of employment, it has become acceptable for these resource industry workers to draw upon unemployment insurance due to a strong mindset that the work has always and will eventually reappear (Sherman 2006). Poor financial planning has left these 'new poor' unprepared to deal with the shock of a busting resource economy. Another key characteristic of the 'new poor' is that many have never lived in poverty before.

The unique pressures of different types of communities can put different groups at-risk for poverty. For example, Bruce (2003) argues that seniors and unattached individuals in retirement communities are more likely to be living in poverty. In contrast, Aboriginal residents, single parents, unattached individuals, and working poor are likely to be living in poverty in more northern and remote communities. Gender can determine when one is likely to be at-risk for poverty. For example, Klein *et al.* (2008) argue that men are more likely to experience poverty when they are single, while women are more likely to experience poverty as single parents or once they become seniors. While Bruce (2003) suggests that single youth and disabled people are not prevalent amongst low-income groups in rural areas, the absence of employment, affordable housing, and support services for such vulnerable groups may result in their migration to larger centres.

1.42 Causes

Due to the many different sources of change that can occur within a household and within a community, there can be many causes of poverty. Literature has documented six key triggers that can push households into poverty and make it difficult to recover, including employment and financial security, housing, health, family / relationship stability, education and skills, and other causes (Canto 2002; Findeis and Jensen 1998; Mills and Hazarika 2003; Robinson 2006; Salamon and MacTavish 2006; Weber *et al.* 2004).

Employment / Financial Security

The employment and financial security of rural residents has been impacted by job losses, seasonal employment, part-time or underemployment with no benefits, low wages, and low social assistance rates (Aron 2006; Bruce 2006; Freudenburg and Gramling 1994; Larson 1989; Rural Welfare Policy Panel 1999; Slack and Jensen 2002; Tickamyer and Duncan 1990; Woods 2005). There are also fewer opportunities for promotion or job progression in rural and small

town places (Vera-Toscano *et al.* 2001), and low-income rural residents are also less likely to benefit from wage increases (Gunderson 2006). Industrial restructuring and limited new job growth has also reduced opportunities for youth (Hanlon and Halseth 2005). Previous research has suggested that rural women are vulnerable to have poor financial security due to lower labour participation rates and lower wages throughout their employment (Lockhead and Scott 2000; McLaughlin 1998; National Advisory Council on Aging). In many resource towns, women have not benefited from the high paying jobs (Tolbert 2006). Despite completing post-secondary education, rural women may also be unable to find employment that fully utilizes their skills (Porterfield 2001). Instead, their employment is often linked to low-paying service sector jobs that have few benefits. After losing a job, households may also experience budgeting problems as they wait for employment assistance payments (Bruce 2006). Furthermore, employment and financial security has not just been a key concern for the working age population, but also for seniors. Notably, older rural women who are divorced or separated are at high-risk for living in poverty as they may no longer have access to the earnings, pension benefits, and other assets that are linked to their former spouse (McLaughlin 1998).

Large distance and low population densities have also limit the employment options available to a broad range of residents (Robinson 2006). With fewer employment offices in rural and small town places, scarce information about labour market trends and job postings can affect employment opportunities and decisions (Levernier *et al.* 2000). However, Lindsay *et al.* (2003) argue that some rural labourers have been reluctant to pursue opportunities in non-traditional sectors of the new rural economy. For those who are able to secure employment, the combination of irregular work schedules (Salomon and MacTavish 2006) and family needs can make it difficult for some to retain jobs, particularly for women after childbirth. Over time, low-income residents may accrue debt and poor credit histories due to their low earning potential (Bruce 2006; Commins 2004), and this can also impact their ability to save money, purchase a home, or develop a pension plan (Raphael 2007).

Housing

Poverty can also be triggered by explicit and hidden housing costs. Booming resource economies, the gentrification of poor areas that provide affordable housing, the invasion of tourism or second home buyers, and housing shortages have increased housing purchase prices and rental costs in rural and small town places more quickly than household incomes (Aron 2006; Cloke *et al.* 2001a; Foulkes and Newbold 2008; Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning 2007; Milbourne 1998; Pleace and Quilgars 2003; Raphael 2007). Landlords who complete renovations may also increase rental rates (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning 2007). As a result, low-income residents may be unable to provide the damage deposit, as well as the first and last month's rent, in order to secure accommodations (Cloke *et al.* 2001a; Raphael 2007). Some residents may become homeless after the condemnation or demolition of their housing or rental units (Beavis *et al.* 1997). Unfortunately, many rural and small town places have limited or no social rental housing options (Bruce 2003; Woods 2005). The lack of rental units in rural and small town places has also forced some low-income residents, such as younger residents, to take on mortgages they cannot afford (Bruce 2003; Milbourne 1998). Even if poorer households acquire a home, they may not have anticipated high interest rates on mortgage loans by sub-prime lenders or property taxes, or be able to afford maintenance,

heating, utilities, and repair costs associated with older housing stocks, particularly in more remote places where costs are generally higher (Bruce 2003, 2007; Geisler and George 2006; Milbourne 1998; Woods 2005). Trailer parks may also have additional hidden costs associated with parking or pets (Salomon and MacTavish 2006). This results in significant financial difficulties, eviction, or mortgage repossession (Robinson 2006). Displaced residents may have no choice but to migrate to poorer communities that may be able to offer more affordable housing options, but in which are likely to have fewer services or support resources (Foulkes and Newbold 2008).

Health

Sudden or chronic health changes may not only reduce, restrict, or impede one's ability to continue employment, but it can also add unanticipated expenses (i.e. funerals, high prescription costs, rehabilitation, etc.) that can be difficult to impossible to cover with low-incomes (Bruce 2006). Such changes may include the death, an unexpected accident, a health crisis of a spouse or child, pregnancy, as well as sexual or physical abuse (Anderson and Christian 2003; Beavis *et al.* 1997; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2000; Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning 2007; Pleace and Quilgars 2003; Raphael 2007; Woods 2005). Short or long-term disabilities, mental health illnesses, and drug and alcohol addictions can impact one's ability to secure and maintain long-term employment (Aron 2006; Cloke *et al.* 2007; Johnson *et al.* 2005; Pleace and Quilgars 2003; Robinson 2006).

Family / Relationship Stability

Structure and changes within families and relationships is the fourth key area that can trigger poverty. For example, single parent households with large numbers of children and limited incomes may find it difficult to adjust to expensive or limited access to childcare, an absence of after school and summer programs, and high costs of living (Davis *et al.* 2003; Duncan and Lamborghini 1994; Raphael 2007; Wells 2002). This can be particularly difficult in small communities that are unable to offer regular parenting support programs. Relationship breakups, family disputes, divorce costs, and poor enforcement of child support payments can also lead to unexpected costs and reduced disposable incomes (Anderson and Christian 2003; Aron 2006; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2000; Raphael 2007; Woods 2005). The consequences may be particularly devastating if families and friends are no longer able to provide support when needed (Robinson 2006).

Education and Skills

Prior to the adoption of labour shedding technologies, many residents were able to secure high-paying low-skilled employment. This left little incentive for residents to invest time and money in their education, resulting in higher high school dropout rates and lower levels of education (Bruce 2006; Davis *et al.* 2003; Freudenburg and Gramling 1994). Labour restructuring trends, however, have produced new demands for high-skilled labour and have left low-skilled labourers at-risk for living in poverty if they are unable to continue to secure stable employment (Levernier *et al.* 2000). At the same time, however, some researchers argue that an overspecialization of skills is also impacting the ability of residents to adapt to changing economic conditions. For

example, Freudenburg and Gramling (1994: 11) argue that “when the offshore oil industry is in decline, an argon welder’s skills may provide little in the way of the kind of human capital needed to get another job”.

Limited training opportunities, however, has been an important barrier to help rural residents prepare to be ready to take advantage of new opportunities (Brown and Lichter 2004; Robinson 2006). Low motivation, poor social skills, and poor work habits also continue to be attributed as limitations impacting human capital development (Pleace and Quilgars 2003; Raphael 2007; Wells 2002).

Other

Finally, there are ‘other’ potential triggers that can push households into poverty, such as unexpected vehicle repairs; insurance costs; disasters such as fires, floods, and storms; peer pressure to uphold an unaffordable lifestyle; and being discharged from a prison or care institutions without adequate supports to make a successful transition (Anderson and Christian 2003; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2000; O’Connell 2003; Woods 2005).

1.43 Coping Mechanisms

Several researchers have documented formal and informal coping mechanisms used by individuals and households living in poverty (Fisher 2001; Harp 1971; Hathaway 1968; Nord 1994; Partridge and Rickman 2005; Raphael 2007; Reimer 2006; Sherman 2006). Many of the strategies used to cope with rural poverty are very similar to those adopted in urban areas (Brown and Lichter 2004). These coping mechanisms are intended to address the income, household, health, and overall quality-of-life of people living in poverty. In this section, we review strategies that low-income residents have used to cope with and escape poverty. This includes a discussion of key barriers that may inhibit the use or effectiveness of such coping mechanisms.

Employment and Income

Finding effective strategies to boost income and maintain employment is perhaps the most important mechanism to help people cope with and escape poverty. In order to be classified as someone who has escaped poverty, individuals or households must cross the low-income threshold and experience a 10% increase in their income (Vera-Toscano *et al.* 2001).

Strategies have been used to diversify income sources by pursuing off-farm income or by combining farming, logging, fishing, or trapping activities (Harp 1971; Hathaway 1968; Tickamyer and Duncan 1990). With few employment options both locally and in nearby communities (Nord 1994), the small size of labour markets in rural and small town places can be an important obstacle for residents to escape poverty (Vera-Toscano *et al.* 2001). Some residents may hold multiple jobs in order to meet basic living needs (Rural Welfare Policy Panel 1999) while others have pursued any sporadic work that may be available (Sherman 2006). The absence of local and regional transportation networks in rural and small town places further impedes the ability of low-income residents who have no vehicle to search for and commute to work on a routine basis (Davis *et al.* 2003; Woods 2005). Even if rural residents own their own

vehicle, Lindsay *et al.* (2003) argue that the remoteness and distance between rural and small town places may mean that commuting is not a realistic option.

In some households, there has been an increase in labour force participation by various family members, including a movement of some family members from part-time to full-time employment (Fortin 2008; Porterfield 2001; Raphael 2007; Snyder *et al.* 2006). For example, women's labour force participation and incomes have increased; however, this is often offset by earning losses of their spouse (Sherman 2006). Another approach to increase disposable household income has involved a change in marital status as single individuals and lone parents have become attached (Anderson and Christian 2003; Finnie and Sweetman 2003; Porterfield 2001; Raphael 2007). However, some research suggests that low-income single mothers are less likely to benefit from full-time employment as an adaptive strategy to escape poverty (Brown and Lichter 2004). With limited employment options, some women have resorted to prostitution in order to earn extra income (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning 2007).

The ability of people living in poverty to cope can be further impacted by the extent to which they pursue and receive all of the benefits that are available to them. Social assistance, disability assistance, and a Guaranteed Income Supplement for low-income seniors have been key sources of such benefits (Sherman 2006). However, rural residents are less likely to pursue and receive public assistance due to the stigma attached to such assistance (Snyder *et al.* 2006). Bramley *et al.* (2000: 507) further note that "not all eligible households claim benefits and not all of the poor are eligible for benefits". Discrepancies between caseloads and poverty rates have clearly demonstrated this phenomenon (Rural Welfare Policy Panel 1999). Some have argued that a lack of awareness or a miscommunication of eligibility requirements has restricted access to these forms of support (Brown and Lichter 2004). Levels of social assistance are also lower for residents living in rural areas (Brown and Lichter 2004), and may not be sufficient to cover the higher costs of living that can be experienced in some rural and small town places (Bruce 2003). Some have argued that foster parents receive more money than parents who were trying to support their children on social assistance (Klein *et al.* 2008). Social assistance provided to residents with permanent disabilities is also underfunded. In British Columbia, a single person with a disability receives \$906 per month or an annual income of \$10,872, which is just 61% of the poverty line in relation to the after-tax LICO (Klein *et al.* 2008).

Some households have drawn upon cash loans to address cash short-falls (Sherman 2006); however, high interest rates can make it difficult for loans to be repaid, thereby deepening their debt and prolonging their experience of living in poverty. While some have turned to family and friends for financial assistance, these close networks of support may experience their own financial troubles during periods of restructuring (Brown and Lichter 2004). Others have completed high school or pursued further education and training in order to improve their employment options (Dore and Kulshreshtha 2003; Duncan and Lamborghini 1994; Levernier *et al.* 2000; Partridge and Rickman 2005; Vera-Toscano *et al.* 2001).

The Informal Economy

The informal economy has been an important tool used to expand the networks and resources available to low-income residents in order to help them to obtain a range of goods and services

that they otherwise could not afford. Engaging in the informal economy has also provided greater self-esteem and has developed work ethic skills amongst low-income people (Sherman 2006). Through acts of reciprocity and unpaid work, low-income residents have exchanged child care duties; completed vehicle repairs, household repairs, and renovations; obtained assistance with yard maintenance, snow removal, and a range of household tasks such as baking, sewing, cleaning, and laundry; and shared car pooling duties (Reimer 2006). Subsistence activities, such as gardening, hunting for wild game, fishing, and gathering firewood, have also been used to maximize personal resources (Fisher 2001; Huskey *et al.* 2004).

Some research cautions, however, that it may be difficult to acquire sufficient benefits from subsistence resources that are dispersed, often remote, and sometimes overexploited (Nord 1994). Subsistence resources also confine people to particular areas that may have limited economic opportunity. Some low-income residents may also lack to various goods and resources to enable them to engage in the informal economy. Reimer (2006) suggests that a broader range of venues for networking are also needed to connect low-income residents with opportunities to engage in informal economy activities. He further argues that supportive policies need to be developed that recognize the value of the informal sector for building skills and providing training opportunities.

Housing

Any stress associated with housing and accommodations, can impact the ability of individuals to maintain their employment (Robinson 2006). Those who are unable to afford permanent housing have resorted to living in tent communities, hunting camps, campgrounds, churches, shelters, barns, personal vehicles, out-houses, garages, hedges, parks, farmer's fields, bus shelters, train stations, and inexpensive motels (Aron 2006; Bruce 2003, 2006; Cloke *et al.* 2001a, 2007; Geisler and George 2006; Robinson 2006). Some people have also performed cooking and cleaning duties in exchange for accommodations (Robinson 2006). Cohabitation has been used by some to improve their economic well-being, although Snyder *et al.* (2006) suggest that cohabiting situations amongst partners with children tend to be short-lived and should only be considered as a short-term adaptive strategy. It is also becoming an increasingly common long-term arrangement for children to be cared for by their grandparents, especially amongst Aboriginal and African American households (Snyder *et al.* 2006). Single mothers living in rural areas have also shared housing with other families and friends in order to share household expenses and child care responsibilities (Brown and Lichter 2004; Porterfield 2001). Cohabitation may also include the co-existence of multiple generations under one roof and couch surfing with family, friends, or Aboriginal clan members (Cloke *et al.* 2007; Geisler and George 2006). While the ability to return to a family home has been a positive strategy to escape poverty and homelessness (Anderson and Christian 2003; Finnie and Sweetman 2003), over time there may be diminished support from family and friends for couch surfing (Robinson 2006).

Several barriers can further impede one's ability to secure safe, adequate, and affordable housing. First and foremost, high housing costs have also been an important factor influencing residential mobility amongst the rural poor (Fitchen 1994). Rising rents to accommodate tourists and industrial workers in booming economies, and landlord prejudices to renting to low-income residents can also affect household security for low-income residents (Bruce 2006; Cloke *et al.*

2001a). Landlords may also charge low-income tenants the maximum allowable rent provided by social assistance programs (Bruce 2003). Furthermore, there are few affordable housing options for youth when they leave their parental home and wish to remain in their rural community (Bruce 2003). As rental or social housing units are often under the name of the male partner, women may also be forced to leave once the relationship ends (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning 2007). Unfortunately, hostels and homeless shelters exist in very few rural and small town places (Cloke *et al.* 2001a).

These stresses have been compounded by the absence, long waiting lists, lengthy processes, and strict criteria to qualify for social housing, including second stage or transitional housing infrastructure (Cloke *et al.* 2001a; Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning 2007; Milbourne 1998). For example, in 2008, BC Housing had over 13,400 applicants on a waiting list for social housing (Klein *et al.* 2008). Individuals who are at-risk for becoming homeless may be unaware of social housing programs in their area (Robinson 2006). In Canada, once Aboriginals leave the reserve and migrate to urban areas, they are no longer under federal jurisdiction and lose access to any free or subsidized housing that is restricted to reserve lands (Beavis *et al.* 1997). Additional barriers to addressing the housing needs of low-income residents include high construction costs, economic uncertainty, a lack of viable housing markets, opposition to low-income housing (NIMBYism), limited economic returns on low-income housing investments, a lack of community leadership, and an absence of supportive public policy, incentives, and regulations (Bruce 2003). As a result, rural residents may be forced to acquire mortgages or move into rental units that they cannot afford (Cloke *et al.* 2001a). In order to avoid eviction, some individuals have cut back on essential goods and services such as food and heating (Cloke *et al.* 2001a).

Health and Nutrition

While many low-income households may look to food banks to obtain food hampers in order to meet their nutritional needs (Robinson 2006), Klein *et al.* (2008) found that half of the food banks in their study only allowed visits once per month. As a result, low-income residents must rely on other sources, such as soup kitchens and drop-in centres, to meet their nutritional needs throughout the month. As residents pursue additional support and resources from drop-in centres and soup kitchens, they may encounter violence, abuse, and other safety concerns that may prevent them from returning (Johnsen *et al.* 2005).

Social Supports

Researchers have argued that the social wage provided by public and non-profit sectors have been especially important for the poor who do not have the financial resource to purchase market substitute (Osberg 2000). As many services have been regionalized, however, there are fewer professionals and supports to help rural residents cope with change. For example, rural residents have access to fewer health care services. Outreach clinics and supports, diagnostic tests, dental care, home care, and referrals continue to be limited in many rural and small town places (Jacob *et al.* 1997; Rural Welfare Policy Panel 1999). Homeless individuals who have been hospitalized may not have access to social workers, representatives of social agencies, or churches to act as an advocate or provide out-patient support (Cloke *et al.* 2002). Access to

counselling and drug and addiction programs may also be limited in rural and small town places (Jacob *et al.* 1997).

Emergency support and advice for people at-risk of being homeless is rarely available in the local community (Robinson 2006). In smaller, more remote places, residents must commute to distant regional centres to access supports or rely on mobile outreach units that may visit smaller communities on a part-time or sporadic basis (Aron 2006). The quality of supports can also be impacted by a more frequent turnover amongst community workers or restricted hours of operation in rural and small town places (Rural Welfare Policy Panel 1999). As noted earlier, few rural and small town places have drop-in centres for the homeless, at-risk individuals and families, and residents with mental health disabilities (Johnsen *et al.* 2005). Instead, public washrooms have been used for personal hygiene (Cloke *et al.* 2007). There may be fewer nonprofit organizations in rural places to assist individuals with key issues such as violence, abuse, literacy, or other aspects of living in poverty (Rural Welfare Policy Panel 1999).

There has been an absence of supports to facilitate labour market participation and community integration of immigrants and Aboriginals in rural and small town places (Chokie and Partridge 2008). There may also be an absence of life skill programs that could be beneficial to develop better housing occupants and give low-income residents a greater chance to obtain and maintain employment (Bruce 2003).

Rural and small town places tend to have fewer trained childcare professionals and fewer regulated childcare spots than larger centres (Rural Welfare Policy Panel 1999). As a result, rural women must travel farther distances to obtain childcare than their urban counterparts (Emlen 1991). While there continues to be a lack of affordable childcare to support labour force participation (Brown and Lichter 2004; Porterfield 2001; Raphael 2007; Rural Welfare Policy Panel 1999), some households have shared child care responsibilities (Sherman 2006).

Mobility

Due to high costs for fuel and repairs, as well as an absence of personal or public transportation options, walking and hitch-hiking have been key forms of mobility both within and between rural and small town places (Cloke *et al.* 2003, 2007). Despite attempts to develop transportation alternatives for local residents, insurance and liability policies have made it uneconomical for non-profit agencies, private businesses, or local governments to develop shuttle van services (Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008).

Migration

Researchers have also debated both the direction of migration and the motives of migration amongst the rural poor. Motivations for rural migration seem to vary across different studies and may include employment opportunities based on potential wages and earnings, educational and training opportunities, opportunities to engage in subsistence activities, particularly for men (Huskey *et al.* 2004), and access to affordable housing (Foulkes and Newbold 2008). For example, while some research suggests that the rural poor tend to move towards other high poverty or rural areas in search of a lower cost of living, cheaper housing, and a safer living

environment (Fitchen 1994; Robinson 2006; Woods 2005), other research suggests that rural residents have migrated to larger urban areas in search of improved employment, services, and social housing options (Cloke *et al.* 2000c, 2001b, 2007). The use of migration is not always an effective coping mechanism to escape poverty, however, as Phimister *et al.* (2000) found that migration from both rural and non-rural areas increased the risk of entering poverty. Beavis *et al.* (1997) further caution that the attachment of urban Aboriginals to rural reserves may result in hypermobility.

1.50 Social Constructs of Rural Poverty

1.51 Social Exclusion

A growing literature is also exploring the relationship between social exclusion and rural poverty (Mohan 2003; Parr *et al.* 2004; Philip and Shucksmith 2003; Thorp *et al.* 2005; Tiepoh and Reimer 2004). Social exclusion is defined as processes that deny people the opportunity to participate in common activities in society (Raphael 2007; Reimer 2004). As Vera-Toscano *et al.* (2001: 10) note, poverty is “about how people are treated and how they regard themselves; about powerlessness, exclusion, and loss of dignity”. In this context, poverty is both a cause and an outcome of social exclusion (Commins 2004). This is because social exclusion both limits access to and leaves poor people with few social networks and potential resources to be used for addressing various aspects of poverty (Thorp *et al.* 2005).

People living in poverty participate less as members of organizations or networks, are less likely to be integrated into public activities, and have limited power or influence over the political agendas and policies that shape their lives (Clapham 2003; Cloke *et al.* 2000b; Duncan and Lamborghini 1994; Freudenburg and Gramling 1994). Limited resources, a lack of education, limited access to networks, a lack of rights, and limited access to transportation can impede one’s ability to participate in economic, educational, political, and social activities (Das 2004; Harrop and Palmer 2002; Osberg 2000; Thorp *et al.* 2005; Tickamyer and Duncan 1990). For example, unless their parents continually request fee waivers from school authorities, low-income students may exclude themselves from school activities and programs (Klein *et al.* 2008). Due to a lack of skills and limited opportunities, Reimer (2004) also suggests that single parent households may be excluded from voluntary support groups and publicly funded programs (i.e. job creation). In a rural context, social exclusion can also be reinforced by isolation (Woods 2005).

A key asset to address poverty has been the ability to develop social networks that transcend class lines (Foulkes and Newbold 2008). Low-income residents, such as those with mental health disabilities or those living in trailer parks or poor neighbourhoods, may be increasingly segregated from other groups in the community (Salomon and MacTavish 2006). Changing values about family obligations and difficulty maintaining family and friend relationships has further impacted the social and support networks of low-income residents. Robinson (2006: 115) further argues, “Homeless people in rural areas can often be invisible to each other and are therefore unable to tap into the informal support, camaraderie, advice, and assistance that has been recognized as so important to surviving and negotiating an escape from homelessness”. Unfortunately, the social exclusion and disconnection of low-income residents from the broader

community can result in a poor understanding of the needs and circumstances of those living in poverty (Cloke *et al.* 2000c; Jacob *et al.* 1997).

Limited access to social and recruitment networks for young or chronically unemployed residents has placed them at a disadvantage to pursue and engage in new employment opportunities (Lindsay *et al.* 2003). In mining communities, for example, jobs tend to be allocated to either family members or to political supporters, thereby excluding those living in poverty (Tickamyer and Duncan 1990). Insecurity or uncertainty of employment and poverty can impact interaction and acts of reciprocity (Das 2004). Again, the absence of informal or formal job search and employment counseling support services in rural and small town places has further isolated and excluded unemployed workers (Lindsay *et al.* 2003).

Some research has also explored the linkages between financial exclusion and the economic disadvantages that are then thrust upon low-income people. For example, these residents may be unable to obtain a mortgage or develop assets that could be used as collateral to finance post-secondary education. People who are financially excluded may include those who have no bank account or balance, those with credit card refusal, and those who resort to using small retailers, pawnshops, payday lending services, or family and friends (Simpson and Buckland 2009). Some banks may refuse to provide mortgages to low-income households who qualify for government programs designed to help them achieve home ownership (Bruce 2003). Poor credit acquired from previous relationships can also make it difficult for low-income women to obtain mortgages.

Due to a lack of broad-based participation, Brown and Warner (1991) also remind us that communities themselves can be 'excluded' from regional development processes that focus more on the needs of private capital rather than on broader social and economic development. Poor communication infrastructure and access to affordable communication mechanisms can also exclude many residents. In 2005, 47% of Canadian communities, mostly rural and small town places, did not have broadband access (Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008). This makes it particularly difficult for rural residents to access government support that now requires the use of technology in the application process (Klein *et al.* 2008).

1.52 Attitudinal Barriers

There are some important attitudinal barriers that have excluded low-income residents and have impacted community responses to poverty and homelessness. As Lawson *et al.* (2010) argue, it is not just political and economic restructuring processes that are important in explaining actions or inactions to address poverty, but so too are cultural and ideological processes. First, there is a perception that poverty does not exist in rural and small town places (Cloke *et al.* 2001a; Commins 2004; Tickamyer and Duncan 1990). It is viewed as an urban problem (Cloke *et al.* 2000c). When homeless people are seen on the streets, they are not viewed as residents, but are seen as unwelcome temporary visitors passing through (Cloke *et al.* 2007; Lawson *et al.* 2008). While community services can provide important spaces of care to facilitate the inclusion of low income residents (Bruce 2006; Cook *et al.* 2002; Johnsen *et al.* 2005; Milbourne 1998), spaces of care, such as soup kitchens, are rare in rural and small town places. There is also a perception that such emergency services would impact the town's image, deter tourists, and impede

economic development (Cloke *et al.* 2000c, 2007; Johnsen *et al.* 2005). There is also a perception that developing such services would create needs and attract more low-income people to live in the community (Cloke *et al.* 2000c, 2001a; Duncan and Lamborghini 1994). Lawson *et al.* (2008) argue that such assertions are designed to silence debate about poverty and strengthen support for neoliberal policies¹.

Poverty may also be viewed as a personal problem. There may be a perception that people living in poverty are undeserving of assistance due to laziness, criminal activity, or addiction problems (Cloke *et al.* 2000c; Lawson *et al.* 2008). Such a perception views people living in poverty ‘as problems’ rather than people ‘living with problems’ (Cloke *et al.* 2000c). Local attitudes and perceptions about poverty can influence how or if poor residents access needed supports. Due to the stigma that has been attached to those living in poverty, people may lose informal support provided by family and friends (Cloke *et al.* 2007; Tickamyer and Duncan 1990). Low-income residents that experience repeated stigma may be cynical about their ability to receive help from service providers or voluntary groups (Robinson 2006). Others may be reluctant to seek help if they feel that they will be assigned a low-priority status (Third 2000). Furthermore, due to shame, embarrassment, and a strong self-help ethic that exists in rural areas, there are people who are reluctant to admit that they are living in poverty and need assistance (Wells 2002; Woods 2005). There is also a perception that some people living in poverty have chosen their lifestyle and do not want assistance (Lawson *et al.* 2008). Such perceptions release communities from any sense of responsibility to take action on rural poverty.

1.60 Government Policies and Strategies

Government policies, programs, and strategies can provide important tools to encourage and guide collaborative approaches to address rural poverty. As Millar (2007: 536) notes, “policy should be concerned with prevention (from adverse events happening) and protection (from the impacts of adverse events), but also with promotion (of exit or escape) and propulsion (away from adverse circumstances). Surprisingly, few researchers have documented local government responses to poverty in rural and small town places or assessed the unintended consequences that senior government policies can have on the rural poor. In this section, we review local government responses to rural poverty before discussing how senior government policies continue to ignore the unique context and experiences of living in poverty in rural and small town places.

1.61 Local Government

Municipal strategies for addressing rural poverty have included designating a staff officer with a specific responsibility to address poverty (Cloke *et al.* 2001a), while others have changed local regulations and by-laws to permit garden suites or second dwelling units in order to expand the stock of affordable rental units (Bruce 2003). Small places have developed partnerships with private sector investors, provided grants / rebates to the private sector, provided building lots, and developed community social housing developments that can accommodate a range of needs (Bradshaw 2006; Bruce *et al.* 2003; Milbourne 1998). For example, local governments in Saint-

¹ “Neoliberalism refers to practices that promote market triumphalism and liberal individualism via deregulated markets and unrestricted competition, alongside the attenuation of public welfare expenditures” (Lawson *et al.*

Fabien-de-Panet, Québec and Preeceville, Saskatchewan have provided building lots for \$1 to encourage social housing developments (Bruce 2003). In British Columbia, the City of Terrace has donated land, waived development fees and off-site costs (i.e. for road improvements, curbs, and gutters), and pursued partnerships with groups like the Dr. R.E.M Lee Foundation and the Real Estate Foundation of BC to develop social housing options for older residents (Ministry of Municipal Affairs 1999). Such efforts demonstrate the collaborative approach that is needed in rural and small town places in order to develop the infrastructure needed to address rural poverty and improve the quality-of-life in these communities. Some buildings have also been converted to provide social housing options in rural and small town places. For example, churches, local hotels, and surplus military housing have been converted into affordable housing units (Bruce 2003). The Muks-Kum Ol Housing Society, an Aboriginal organization in Terrace, BC, purchased a former regional correctional facility to develop social housing for Aboriginal elders in the Terrace region (Terrace Standard, March 30, 2005, pg. A3).

Research, however, has also described a range of political barriers that inhibit community responses to rural poverty. For example, rural authorities have fewer resources and are less likely than their urban counterparts to assess the scale and scope of poverty and homelessness in their communities, making it less likely that such issues will be addressed (Bruce 2007; Cloke *et al.* 2001a; Robinson 2006). In some cases, communities have adopted strict policing policies to ‘regulate’ the problem of homelessness rather than respond to the needs (Cloke *et al.* 2000c; Pleace and Quilgars 2003). Rural groups may find it difficult to get local governments to adopt social housing as a key priority on their agenda (Bruce 2006). As Milbourne (1998) suggests, rural local governments rarely have the political will to raise taxes for local social housing programs. Voluntary organizations and low-income residents rarely have any financial lever over local government politics and decisions (Cloke *et al.* 2000c). Voluntary groups who may speak on behalf of low income residents are often only consulted informally, while business interests and more powerful constituencies often have greater involvement and influence in formal consultation processes (Freudenberg and Gramling 1994; Milbourne 1998).

Furthermore, cheap land and inadequate rural zoning and development guidelines may lead to poor development (Salomon and MacTavish 2006). Local governments have also been criticized for allowing rural areas to become ‘dumping grounds’ for less desirable developments such as hog farms and prisons (Lawson *et al.* 2010). Local governments have also contributed to poverty by demolishing cabins or other housing options for low-income residents (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning 2007). At the same time, some local governments have established by-laws prohibiting people from living in tents within municipal limits, thereby forcing impoverished people with limited or no transportation options to establish tents far away from needed community supports (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning 2007). As many income, employment, and housing support programs are regulated and administered by senior levels of government, however, local governments may lack the authority and jurisdiction to address key poverty issues in their community (Bruce 2007).

1.62 Senior Government Policies and Programs

Senior levels of government have also deployed various initiatives aimed at reducing homelessness and poverty (Botterill 2002; O'Connell 2003; Priemus and Kemp 2004). This section explores how senior jurisdictions have developed poverty strategies and formalized government structures, provided income supports and employment programs; formalized government supports; and deployed economic development, housing, and relocation programs in order to address poverty.

Poverty Strategies

National poverty strategies are critical to develop and deploy a comprehensive, coordinated approach to addressing rural poverty. In 2007, Ireland adopted a national poverty strategy called a National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (Government of Ireland 2007). The goal of the strategy is to eliminate consistent poverty by 2016. Furthermore, the United Kingdom is on track for meeting its goal to reduce child poverty by half by 2009 (Klein *et al.* 2008). In 2002, the United Kingdom also adopted the Homelessness Act which required local housing authorities to complete strategic reviews of homelessness across different demographic and household characteristics and produce publicly available strategies about tackling homelessness (O'Connell 2003).

While there is no national poverty, housing, or child care strategies in Canada (Raphael 2007), poverty strategies have been developed in the provinces of Québec (2002) and Newfoundland and Labrador (2006) (Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008), and additional strategies are being developed in Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick (Klein *et al.* 2008). Québec adopted the Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2002 (Government of Québec 2002). In 2007, Newfoundland and Labrador also became the first province to index welfare rates to inflation (Klein *et al.* 2008).

Formal Government Structures

By formalizing responsibilities and mandates, some governments have, at times, made poverty a greater priority. In 1999, the United Kingdom created a Homelessness Directorate within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. This Directorate had a mandate to tackle the prevention of homelessness and to set targets for eliminating homelessness amongst families with children (O'Connell 2003). During the same year, the federal government in Canada announced a new cabinet position, the Minister Responsible for Homelessness (Bruce 2006). The intention of this cabinet position was to reintroduce a mandate, resources, and responsibilities for homelessness to the minister responsible for housing.

Income Supports

In Canada, the Canadian Assistance Plan (CAP) was introduced in 1966 to provide social assistance to those in need (Raphael 2007). Shortly after, the Guaranteed Income Supplement was introduced in 1967 in order to reduce poverty amongst seniors (Osberg 2000). Other key

government transfer programs include unemployment insurance², which is a federal program that supports unemployed workers for up to one year; a family allowance (1973) that provides a supplement for each child under 18 years of age, a refundable Child Tax Credit (1979), and social assistance (1966), a provincially operated program providing income support to households living in poverty (Hanratty and Blank 1990). In the United States, low-income residents have access to unemployment insurance, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (formerly Aid to Families with Dependent Children), food stamps, and an earned income tax program for low-wage workers (Hanratty and Blank 1990; Larson 1989; Lichter and Johnson 2007; Rural Welfare Policy Panel 1999).

Employment Counselling and Support Programs

Employment counseling and training programs provide instrumental support to help unemployed workers re-enter the workforce. Although counseling services have not been available in rural communities on a routine basis, senior levels of government in Canada have allocated counselors to rural communities following an economic crisis to provide residents with career counseling and to connect them with government programs (Poetschke 1971).

Senior governments have also deployed temporary, short-term programs to assist workers impacted by restructuring. In 2006, the federal government announced a program called the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers. This was a two-year cost-sharing program with provincial and territorial partners. Targeting workers between 55 and 64 years of age, the program was designed to help displaced, unemployed workers in the forest industry to upgrade their skills and improve their employability (Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008). A key concern with such targeted programs is that while they assist workers directly impacted by lay-offs in the forest industry, there are no accompanying programs to assist workers in other sectors of the local economy who may also have been impacted by a decline in the forest industry.

Other anti-poverty approaches have included wage subsidy programs to attract industry to rural and small town places, as well as raising the minimum wage (Harp 1971; Larson 1989). The approach to increase minimum wage has been met with concerns that it would cause more unemployment. Instead, there have been more calls for senior levels of government to reduce taxes on the working poor, allocate more resources for education and training, nutrition, and child care programs, and provide more support to help dislocated workers find new jobs (Larson 1989).

Economic Development

Senior governments have worked with communities and regions to attract higher-wage industries to rural and small town places (Larson 1989). In Canada, the federal government has also opened up federal offices in rural and small town places to expand employment opportunities. For example, Citizenship and Immigration offices were established in Sydney, Nova Scotia (Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008). In the United States, public

² In 1996, the Unemployment Insurance program in Canada was restructured and changed to become the Employment Insurance program (Osberg 2000).

facilities, such as prisons, have been located in rural and small town places that have limited employment (Blank 2005). Prison developments in rural areas, however, must be supported with effective discharge planning and outreach supports in order to prevent the growth of poverty and homelessness in these areas (Aron 2006). Community development trust funds have also been established with support from federal governments in order to assist vulnerable communities during their transition or rebuilding phases (Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008). Due to the higher rates of economic and employment growth associated with higher amenity rural areas (Lawson *et al.* 2010), investments have also been made in public and community facilities to attract new businesses, creative workers, and residents (Blake 2005).

Housing Programs

Over the past two decades, a broader range of social housing initiatives have been encouraged by senior levels of government. Between 1999 and 2003, a new program in Canada called the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative under a new National Homelessness Initiative was designed to pursue a more comprehensive approach to homelessness by developing a range of housing infrastructure (i.e. affordable housing, emergency shelters, transitional / second stage housing) (Bruce 2006). In Canada, the Regional Homelessness Fund was also established to support services that target at-risk populations from becoming homeless. In the United States, the Shelter Plus Care program was established in 1990 to develop a more comprehensive approach to homelessness by developing a range of housing options and connecting the homeless with local services (O'Connell 2003). Shortly after, the Safe Havens program was deployed in 1992 to target homeless people with mental illnesses (O'Connell 2003).

Senior levels of government have also developed private sector incentives and public-private partnerships in order to expand social housing infrastructure. For example, the Nova Scotia Affordable Rental Housing Program is a federal-provincial cost-sharing partnership that provides capital subsidies to new private sector rental construction in exchange for a guarantee of long-term affordable rental rates (Bruce 2007). In the United States, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development announced a loan guarantee program to stimulate access to private financing for low-income residents (Geisler and George 2006). Furthermore, the USDA Rural Housing Service provides homeownership loans for low-income families in rural and small town places.

Relocation Programs

In places with limited infrastructure and development options, relocation programs have been used to move residents to places with greater employment and labour market matches in order to reduce poverty (Levernier *et al.* 2000; Poetschke 1971). In 1965, for example, the Provincial Government in Newfoundland signed an agreement with the federal government to establish a resettlement program that moved over 20,000 people from 148 outport communities into larger centres (Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008).

1.63 Key Problems with Senior Government Policies and Programs

Despite these initiatives, there continues to be eight key problems that impede the effectiveness of senior government policies and programs to address rural poverty. These include a lack of power or responsibility to produce change, the poor management of government programs, programs that are poorly designed to address the needs of rural and small town places, strict criteria that limits access to needed supports, a reduction in benefits provided to people living in poverty, the use of social policies that are not designed to help people escape poverty, the reduction or elimination of social programs to address rural poverty, and tax barriers.

Lack of Power or Responsibility to Produce Change

Rural poverty, or poverty in general, has rarely been a key priority for any national government. This is depicted not only by the limited resources that are allocated to address the needs of those living in poverty, but it is also evident as many key government departments lack any formal mandate or responsibility to focus on rural poverty. As Blank (2005) notes, government policies are only effective if there is a government willingness to implement them. In Canada, the Rural Secretariat has played a key role in applying a rural lens to policy and program developments. However, since the minister of any sponsoring department has the final say over any decisions, the Rural Secretariat has no authority to implement any of their recommendations (Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008). Furthermore, the uncertain nature of the Rural Secretariat's funding has made it difficult for this body to engage in long-term planning. Recently, the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry (2008) recognized the need for a rural champion within the federal system to tackle rural poverty in Canada.

There are also insufficient policies and regulations to address rural poverty. In the United States, the McKinney Act (1987) has been a key piece of legislation that has influenced senior government poverty policies. The act, however, included no requirement for temporary accommodations to be provided for homeless people who were seeking permanent housing (O'Connell 2003).

Programs are Poorly Managed

One of the most important barriers to delivering effective policies and programs to address rural poverty is that many government programs are mismanaged, and benefits and supports are not reaching those who need it most. In Canada, for example, Hanratty and Blank (1990: 22) state that "of the \$3 billion increase in Canadian UI and Social Assistance payments to non-elderly families between 1970 and 1979, only 24% was received by the poor". More recently, in 2008, the federal government in Canada eliminated an income supplement program for farm families despite their failure to spend the \$550 million allocated to the program (Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008). Raphael (2007) has also cited recent examples when government funds earmarked for social programs have not been used for their intended purpose. While benefits associated with Canada's employment insurance program have been frozen for 10 years, the federal government in Canada has collected \$48 billion more in EI premiums than it has paid out in benefits over the last decade. Furthermore, in 1995, the Canadian Assistance Plan program was abolished and replaced with the Canadian Health and

Social Transfer (CHST) program that lumped social welfare spending with health and education spending (Raphael 2007). Lumping these funds together has essentially eroded the financial resources allocated to social programs as the use of CHST funds could be allocated at the discretion of provincial stakeholders (Raphael 2007). Rural development approaches that have been influenced by the ‘growth pole theory’ have also been criticized as policy makers assume that assistance targeted in key urban centres will trickle down to smaller places throughout the region (Markey *et al.* 2005).

Programs are Poorly Designed for Rural and Small Town Places

Many policies to address poverty have been based upon the needs of urban populations and have typically ignored the unique circumstances and needs of rural communities (Brown and Lichter 2004). For example, researchers argue that national programs designed to address homelessness in the United Kingdom, such as the Rough Sleeper’s and Cold Weather initiatives, have been urban biased (Cloke *et al.* 2000c; O’Connell 2003). In Canada, a report on rural poverty that was released by the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry (2008) identified several federal initiatives, such as the National Homeless Initiative and Affordable Housing Initiative, that continue to be urban focused. In the United States, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) guidelines stipulate that teenage mothers seeking public assistance must live with their parents or guardians (Snyder and McLaughlin 2004). Such policies may not be suitable in rural areas that may not have adequate, safe housing infrastructure to accommodate multi-generational family networks.

Furthermore, federal government funding criteria does not reflect the unique circumstances of rural and small town places. Rather, rural agencies are often required to meet urban-based criteria to target specific groups rather than adopt a more generalized approach to delivering supports (Aron 2006). Welfare to work programs also fail to recognize the unique circumstances of rural communities that may not have adequate employment opportunities, childcare options, or transportation infrastructure to enable welfare recipients to commute to both jobs both locally and around the region (Brown and Lichter 2004; Blank 2005; Gunderson 2006; Rural Welfare Policy Panel 1999).

Several job training and infrastructure development programs have been rolled out under the assumption that the poor will benefit from the trickle down effects in the labor market (Brown and Warner 1991). However, as Tickamyer and Duncan (1990) argue, local residents may not have the qualifications to benefit from such programs. New industries and businesses are likely to import outside workers for these new high-skilled, high paying jobs. While the unemployed may be able to access funding for technical and vocational training programs, these training opportunities are often based in larger, more distant urban locations (Poetschke 1971). Brown and Warner (1991) further suggest that retraining and job development programs have not generated the impact that one might expect due to a failure to dovetail such programs with the assets and aspirations of local economic and community development interests.

Eligibility Criteria Restricts Access to Program Support

Due to strict eligibility requirements, many government assistance and support programs remain inaccessible to those in need. With limited resources, many social assistance, housing, and development supports are targeted towards low-income households containing children; residents who are deemed to be vulnerable, notably seniors or those with physical or mental health disabilities; and those who have met local residency requirements (Cloke *et al.* 2000b, 2001a; Milbourne 1998; O'Connell 2003; Robinson 2006, Third 2000). This leaves single individuals, particularly low-income youth, and couples with no children with few options (Anderson and Christian 2003; Bruce 2006; O'Connell 2003).

Program criteria may also be accompanied with unrealistic assumptions and expectations that can have unintended consequences and may reduce access to needed supports. In the United States, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) guidelines stipulate that teenage mothers seeking public assistance must live with their parents or guardians (Snyder and McLaughlin 2004). The combined household income is then used to determine eligibility, thereby making it less likely that these low-income teenage mothers will receive assistance. In Canada, public service agencies may also restrict youth access to 'adult' supports because they are under 19 years of age and still considered to be children living at home (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning 2007). This creates additional barriers for youth who are leaving unstable or unsafe living environments. Local residency requirements for social housing can create another barrier for rural residents who are searching for working in other communities. Furthermore, some social housing programs are only accessible to applicants who are homeless, thereby eliminating such supports to women who may be staying in transitional housing after leaving a relationship (Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning 2007).

Eligibility criteria for government programs are also constantly being changed. This makes it difficult for potential recipients to monitor, understand, and maneuver processes, and eventually to obtain supports. In Canada, for example, minimum requirements to qualify for unemployment insurance in the late 1970s changed frequently from a minimum of working 8 weeks to between 10 and 14 weeks to 20 weeks (Hanratty and Blank 1990). Today, the minimum requirements to qualify for Employment Insurance in Canada are based upon the unemployment rate for a particular region, which also vary from province to province (See Osberg 2000; Service Canada: www.servicecanada.gc.ca) (Table 1). The requirements are more stringent for first time workers or those who have been absent from the workforce for two years as they must accumulate a minimum of 910 hours of insurable employment (Klein *et al.* 2008). Strict qualifying criteria for Employment Insurance programs may not reflect the unique challenges experiences in rural and small town places where residents tend to experience prolonged periods of unemployment (Blank 2005).

Table 1: Requirements for Employment Insurance in Canada

Regional Rate of Unemployment	Required Hours of Employment in the Last 52 Weeks
6.0% or less	700
6.1% to 7.0%	665
7.1% to 8.0%	630
8.1% to 9.0%	595
9.1% to 10.0%	560
10.1% to 11.0%	525
11.1% to 12.0%	490
12.1% to 13.0%	455
13.1% or more	420

Source: Service Canada 2010. Accessed on-line at: www.servicecanada.gc.ca.

Recipients are Receiving Fewer Benefits and Supports

Neoliberal policies have reduced the benefits that are provided under social programs. In Canada, the federal government has repeatedly reduced the benefits that displaced workers receive under the Employment Insurance program. In the late 1970s, for example, the maximum benefits allocated to eligible recipients have been reduced to 60% of their previous earnings (Hanratty and Blank 1990). Today, recipients are able to receive 55% of their average insurable weekly earnings up to a maximum of \$457 per week (Service Canada 2010). These benefits may be received for a period of between 14 and 45 weeks depending on the total number of insurable hours that a potential recipient has worked and depending on the unemployment rate for a particular region. In the United States, unemployment insurance is typically available for about 26 weeks (Hanratty and Blank 1990).

Despite arguments that spending cuts by senior levels of government are likely to increase poverty rates (Finnie and Sweetman 2006), support provided under provincial social assistance programs has been reduced in many jurisdictions. For example, in 1996, the Province of Ontario cut social assistance payments by 21% (Osberg 2000). Regulations in BC permit welfare recipients to be cut-off after two years (Klein *et al.* 2008). Raphael (2007) further argues that some Canadian provinces refuse to provide the federal National Child Benefit to families on social assistance. In other cases, provincial governments may deduct any benefits received from the Canada Child Tax Benefit / National Child Benefit Supplement from any social assistance that is provided to low-income households (Klein *et al.* 2008). Levels of support across various social assistance regimes can vary across jurisdictions. In the United States, for example, the average social assistance rates in 1997 were \$289.50 in Minnesota and \$287.10 in Vermont, but were just \$132.50 in Texas and \$107.20 in Mississippi (Osberg 2000).

Combined, the low levels of support provided to low-income households under these social programs does not enable them to keep pace with the rising costs of living and can increase the prevalence of poverty. Cloke *et al.* (2001a) describe restrictions imposed by the Single Room Rent guidelines in the United Kingdom which limits housing stipends for individuals under 25 years of age to the average cost of renting a room in a shared house. In British Columbia, a

single person is provided with \$610 per month for social assistance – a stipend that, in many communities, is not sufficient to cover the average rate for rental units. Klein *et al.* (2008) argue that welfare systems have become structured to be dependent on food banks and other charities in order for recipients to meet their basic needs.

Social Policies and Programs are not Designed to Help People Escape Poverty

Several researchers have argued that some social policies and programs are designed to restrict access to needed supports rather than to help people escape poverty. For example, single-female mothers on social assistance may not have access to affordable child care that would enable them to participate in the labour force (Raphael 2007). Strict and insufficient time limits may also be imposed on job training programs that do not allow uneducated rural residents to fully develop their human capital and enable them to take advantage of new emerging opportunities. In British Columbia, income assistance recipients are not allowed to attend post-secondary educational institutions while on social assistance, thereby restricting their ability to develop the skills and assets necessary to pursue long-term meaningful employment (Klein *et al.* 2008). In the United States, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reform Act limits potential recipients to obtain no more than 12 months of education or training that can be counted as “work”, thereby restricting the possibility that low-income individuals will pursue and receive a post-secondary education. Being restricted to lower levels of education only increases the prospect that many low-income people will remain living in poverty. As Brown and Warner (1991: 37) argue, investments in human capital “may have greater impacts on poverty reduction than direct investments in economic development”.

Supports may also be terminated once someone is no longer homeless. For example, O’Connell (2003) argues that, in the United States, homeless families receive more services than if they were not homeless, such as job training, assistance with job location, health care, parenting, and other support services. A continuum of supports is needed to support residents who, while no longer homeless, may still be at-risk for becoming homeless in the future.

In Canada, regulations stipulate that low-income residents can only earn so much money before it is deducted from any government assistance that is provided, thereby producing a welfare trap (Raphael 2007). At the same time, new low minimum wage rates have been introduced for people entering the labour market. Such policies are geared to improve the competitiveness of businesses rather than assist low-income residents seeking to gain work experience and escape poverty. The Provincial Government in British Columbia, for example, introduced a minimum wage rate of just \$6 per hour for the first 500 hours of work for new labourers entering the workforce. Klein *et al.* (2008) argue that young workers have lost their jobs once the 500 hours are completed, and immigrant women have continued to receive the same low wages after the qualifying period has ended.

Resources for Social Programs are Reduced or Eliminated

Neoliberal policies have been reducing the fiscal resources that are allocated to social service and infrastructure programs. In the United Kingdom, the recession of the early 1980s led to a withdrawal of local state housing interventions (Milbourne 1998). Social housing developments

were sold on the private market, thereby reducing the overall social housing stock (Anderson and Christian 2003; Milbourne 1998). Since 1993, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation also no longer functions as a key provider of social housing infrastructure, such as co-operative housing developments (Bruce 2007; Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008). The responsibility to provide social housing has been offloaded onto provincial jurisdictions, the private sector, and non-profit groups. Unfortunately, private leadership and investments have not emerged to develop new social housing in many rural and small town places (Milbourne 1998).

A key flaw inherent in many government policies and programs that target poverty is that they are rarely supported with adequate financial resources to make them effective, particularly in a rural context (Blake 2005). For example, Bruce (2006) notes that there is limited government funding for new social housing investments on Aboriginal reserves in Canada. Senior government responses to rural poverty and rural decline also tend to be short-term, sporadic, and reactive rather than long-term, comprehensive, and proactive. Long-term funding supports are needed in order to support comprehensive, collaborative, long-term approaches to address rural poverty. In Canada, for example, short-term programs such as the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration and the Maritime Marshland Rehabilitation Administration have been designed to address specific problems rather than a diversified approach to community renewal and resiliency (Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008). In 2008, the Canadian federal government terminated a two-year pilot program called the Farm Families Options Program. This pilot program guaranteed a minimum of \$25,000 for families and \$15,000 for single individuals (Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008). In the United States, various initiatives under the McKinney Act have been susceptible to unstable funding sources. For example, while this act established an Interagency Council on the Homeless to coordinate programs across 18 federal agencies, the funding for this council was terminated in 1994 before being reactivated in 2001 (O'Connell 2003).

Tax Barriers

Tax structures and regulations can also make it difficult for low-income households in rural and small town places to creatively manage their assets and adjust to the higher costs of living that can be encountered in more remote places. For example, a rural poverty report released by the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry (2008) found that capital gains taxes can act as a barrier for farm families to transfer their farm assets to their children. The report also found that the Northern Resident Deduction is not sufficient to offset the higher costs of living in remote and northern communities.

1.70 Looking Forward

This literature review has explored some of the complex factors that drive poverty in rural and small town places. Despite characterizations of resource towns as places with high wages, there have always been disadvantaged groups. Economic and social change is challenging more and more households in these places. Research on rural poverty is generally limited, but needs addressing if we are to develop sensible place-based policy solutions.

To date, there has been limited research on the changing nature of poverty in rural and small town places experiencing significant economic restructuring (Milbourne 2010). For example, research is needed to understand the factors and processes that create and reproduce rural poverty across different demographic groups and across different contexts (Commins 2004; Philip and Shucksmith 2003). Research has also yet to explore how adaptive strategies may vary across different socio-demographic groups. While a significant body of research has explored the experiences and circumstances of certain demographic groups, such as youth, others suggest that work on the experiences of homelessness amongst seniors and ethnic minorities remains understudied (Third 2000). For example, little research has explored the later life pathways into poverty and homelessness (Anderson and Christian 2003). Research is also needed to understand the adaptive strategies of low-income grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in rural areas (Snyder *et al.* 2006). Little is also known about the experiences of mental health clients living in poverty in rural and small town places (Fraser *et al.* 2005; Parr *et al.* 2004). Despite a growing literature on social exclusion and poverty, more attention also needs to be directed at the specific features of rural poverty and social exclusion (Commins 2004).

Lawson *et al.* (2010: 656) argue that “research on the ways neoliberal processes are working out in rural places is extremely limited”. A critical examination of the success of government initiatives in addressing rural poverty has been limited (Porterfield 2001). Specifically, a critical examination of policy and program interventions is needed to assess which policies are more symbolic and which ones produce meaningful change (Clapham 2003). In this context, research is also needed to assess if new welfare reforms have led to a new set of coping strategies for those living in poverty (Brown and Lichter 2004). For example, it is unclear whether such reforms have led to new family structures or living arrangements. Furthermore, there could be a closer examination of the disconnect between emerging trends that produce rural poverty and the capacity of households, service providers, and communities to adjust to such changes. More longitudinal research is also needed to assess and understand the duration and frequency of experiences that rural residents have with poverty.

We also know little about how new labour market arrangements (short-term contract, casual, increased demand for consultants) is impacting or producing poverty in rural and small town places. Further research could explore the deployment, use, and effectiveness of labour market information and employment opportunities across various demographic groups. An investigation of the impacts of job growth policies and programs for rural workers is also needed (Davis *et al.* 2003).

Finally, previous studies suggest that rural poverty requires rural-specific policies as the processes and pathway experiences of poverty across various communities can be quite different (Clapham 2003; Crump 2002; Phimister *et al.* 2000). Despite the unique way in which poverty can be experienced in rural and small town places, Milbourne (2010: 161) notes that previous studies “tend to position individuals in space according to their low incomes without taking into account the differential local contexts of their situations, such as costs of living, levels of welfare funding, and the other benefits or penalties that compound the advantages or disadvantages of particular groups by virtue of where they live”. Brown and Warner (1991) further argue that the characteristics and capacity of the local infrastructure and institutions can be important

determinants of poverty in different rural and small town places. This is because such characteristics condition opportunities to escape poverty. Despite several studies that have focused on people living in poverty, place-based approaches to understanding rural poverty continue to be limited (Sherman 2006).

Part Two: Methodological Approaches to Studying Rural Poverty

2.10 Introduction

Over the past 30 years, job losses associated with industrial and economic restructuring has resulted in higher rates of unemployment, exacerbated household stress, and has produced many different forms of poverty. Unstable labour markets have also resulted in considerable mobility and migration as residents search for employment and training opportunities. At the same time that rural and small town places have experienced economic and social restructuring, services have become increasingly regionalized and processes to access supports have been streamlined and mechanized. Constant changes to this complex service environment and economy can condition the potential opportunities or barriers to escape poverty (Brown and Warner 1991). Previous studies suggest that the processes and pathway experiences of poverty across various communities can be quite different despite similar levels of low-income (Clapham 2003; Crump 2002). If a broader understanding of how place constructs and produces different experiences of living in poverty is to emerge, then researchers must deploy qualitative methodological approaches that are capable of exploring the complexity of different forms of rural poverty. As Milbourne (2010: 167) argues, “the multi-dimensional nature of poverty demands more sophisticated modes of research if geographers are to capture the structural underpinnings, statistical significance, and diversity of experience of poverty across different spatial contexts”. The goal of this review is to explore various measures and qualitative methodological approaches to conducting research on rural poverty.

This review begins with a discussion of the usefulness and limitations of different measures of poverty as they pertain to the unique context of rural and small town places. As research on poverty involves interviews with vulnerable, and potentially mobile, groups in small communities that have limited social infrastructure, our review will explore sensitive methodological approaches to conducting research with vulnerable populations with a particular focus on how these methodological approaches may be applied within a rural and small town context.

2.20 Measures of Poverty

Over the years, researchers have used a variety of measures to assess poverty (Borooah 2008; Bramley *et al.* 2000; Human Resources and Social Development Canada 2006; Osberg 2000; Robinson 2002). The attributes that are included across these measures can paint a very different picture of rural poverty, and therefore, users of data produced by such measures should take considerable care when interpreting the data. In Canada, there is no official poverty line in (Bruce 2007). With no common definition of ‘poverty’, the dominant approach for assessing poverty has involved calculations of households living below a specific income threshold (Milbourne 2010). However, the threshold at which a household enters poverty has varied considerably across different measures. Examples of low-income thresholds have included:

- Individuals who earn less than 66% of the median wage of the typical worker,
- Full-time workers earning less than \$375 per week,

- Families with a household income less than 50% of the median after-tax income,
- Individuals with a disposable income below the Market Basket Measure of low-income, or
- Individuals who fall below the low-income cut-off and spend 62% or more of their household income on food, clothing, and shelter (Raphael 2007, Woods 2005).

At a community level, thresholds between 20-40% of the population living below a specific income threshold have been used to identify rural and small town places as disproportionately poor (Lichter and Johnson 2007).

In the following sections, we will explore these different approaches to measuring poverty in more detail. First, a review of key issues with Census data is provided since such data provides a critical foundation for building measures of poverty. With our interest in exploring rural poverty in Canada, we then explore three prominent approaches to measuring poverty in Canada, including the low-income cut-offs and low-income measures developed by Statistics Canada and the market-based measure developed by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. Finally, we will identify some other approaches that have been used to measure poverty and homelessness and discuss their strengths and limitations for examining this topic in a rural and small town context.

2.21 Census Data

Studies that examine poverty and homelessness have been hampered by the absence of longitudinal data and the poor quality of national data systems (Finnie and Sweetman 2003; O'Connell 2003; Osberg 2000). Unfortunately, poor quality or underreported data can result in false assumptions that poverty or homelessness is a relatively small problem, and therefore, result in inadequate funding (Third 2000). Studies interested in persistently poor regions have also been hampered by the limited availability of rural labour market data (Davis *et al.* 2003; Tickamyer and Duncan 1990).

Since the mid-1990s, national statistical agencies have attempted to improve the availability and quality of data in order to facilitate research into some of the facets of poverty (Milbourne 2010). In Canada, Statistics Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics provides estimates of labour market activity and the prevalence of low-income in Canada (Fortin 2008; Osberg 2000). Although it only became public in 2009, the Longitudinal Administrative Database in Canada provides a sample of tax filer data that consists of information on income and other socio-demographic characteristics (National Council of Welfare 2010). Wages rates, hours of work, occupation, industry, and other job characteristics, however, are not available in the database (Finnie and Sweetman 2003). Furthermore, while tax filer data has been used for some studies examining poverty, this type of data is not reported at the rural census subdivision level (Bruce 2007).

There are some important limitations to consider when using Census data to support studies on rural poverty. As Census data is only collected every five years, it can mask intermediary trends and crisis events such as industry closures that can cause an increase in poverty rates between Census periods (Bruce 2007). Data suppression and rounding procedures also make it difficult

to obtain an accurate picture of poverty in rural and small town places. Finally, some households may under report other sources of income support, particularly amongst the elderly and the unemployed (Bramley *et al.* 2000).

2.22 Low-Income Cut-Offs

Statistics Canada created the low-income cut-off measure in 1969 (Hanratty and Blank 1990). According to Statistics Canada (2006: 7), low-income cut-offs (LICOs) are defined as the “income threshold below which a family will likely devote a larger share of its income on the necessities of food, shelter, and clothing than the average family”. It is further understood as the “threshold at which families are expected to spend 20 percentage points more than the average family on food, shelter, and clothing”. Calculations obtained from the 1992 Family Expenditures Survey are used as a basis for determining the LICO values. According to this survey, the average family spent 43% of its after-tax income on food, shelter, and clothing (Klein *et al.* 2008). Therefore, any family who spends 63% or more of its after-tax income on food, shelter, and clothing is identified as a low-income household. After determining the LICO for the base year, LICOs for following years are determined by multiplying the LICO for 1992 by the Consumer Price Index inflation rate for the following year. This is then divided by the Consumer Price Index for the base year of 1992. Although there has been considerable debate about the use of ‘before’ versus ‘after’ tax LICO measures, after tax measures tend to be used to reflect the redistribution of Canada’s tax / transfer system through income taxes (Statistics Canada 2006). Furthermore, as disposable income is based on after-tax dollars, after-tax LICOs have been used to assess overall economic well-being (Statistics Canada 2006) (Table 2).

Table 2: Before-Tax Versus After-Tax LICOs for 2005

Number of People	Rural areas		Less than 30,000		Less than 100,000	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
1 person	14,303	11,264	16,273	12,890	17,784	14,380
2 persons	17,807	13,709	20,257	15,690	22,139	17,502
3 persons	21,891	17,071	24,904	19,535	27,217	21,794
4 persons	26,579	21,296	30,238	24,373	33,046	27,190
5 persons	30,145	24,251	34,295	27,754	37,480	30,962
6 persons	33,999	26,895	38,679	30,780	42,271	34,338
7 persons	37,853	29,539	43,063	33,806	47,063	37,713

Source: Statistics Canada. 2006. Low Income Cut-Offs for 2005 and Low Income Measures for 2004. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

A key concern for LICO measures is that they are restricted to food, clothing, and shelter, but do not take into account other expenses such as transportation (Bruce 2007; Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 2008). Such poverty measures also typically assume that rural and small town places have lower housing costs (Bruce 2007). This assumption no longer reflects the diversity of the rural landscape where booming resource towns; particularly oil and gas towns, tourism towns, and bedroom communities located close to metropolitan centres, can result in higher housing costs (Bruce 2003).

2.23 Low-Income Measures

In addition to LICOs, Statistics Canada releases data for Low-Income Measures which are commonly used for international comparisons with other OECD countries (Statistics Canada 2006). The LIM is defined as one-half of the median income of an adjusted family income – adjusted referring to changes made to reflect different family needs (i.e. family size, number of adults, number of children, etc.). LIMs are calculated using the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics. Unlike LICOs, LIMs are not adjusted according to expenditures on goods and services and does not account for differences in community size (Bruce 2007; Statistics Canada 2006) (Table 3).

Table 3: Low Income Measures Before and After Taxes for 2004

	Number of Children											
	0		1		2		3		4		5	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Adults												
1	16,253	14,101	22,754	19,741	27,630	23,972	32,506	28,202	37,382	32,432	42,258	36,663
2	22,754	19,741	27,630	23,972	32,506	28,202	37,382	32,432	42,258	36,663	47,134	40,893
3	29,255	25,382	34,131	29,612	39,007	33,842	43,883	38,073	48,759	42,303	53,635	46,533
4	35,757	31,022	40,633	35,253	45,508	39,483	50,384	43,713	55,260	47,943	60,136	52,174

Source: Statistics Canada. 2006. Low Income Cut-Offs for 2005 and Low Income Measures for 2004. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

2.34 Market-Based Measures

A key concern with poverty measures in Canada is that they do not adequately account for the higher costs of living for a broader range of goods and services in more remote rural settings (Snyder and McLaughlin 2004). The Market Basket Measure of low-income developed in 1997 by Human Resources and Social Development Canada and the Federal-Provincial Territorial Working Group of officials on Social Development Research and Information provides one possible response to such concerns (Fortin 2008). This measure assesses the ability of a disposable household income to purchase a range of goods and services (i.e. food, shelter, utilities, appliances, clothing and footwear, transportation, insurance, personal care, school supplies, telephone services, recreation and entertainment, household items, etc.). Expenses for child care, health care, including prescriptions, alimony, and any mandatory payroll deductions are first deducted before comparing the remaining disposable income to the basket of goods and services (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2009). Households that do not have sufficient income to purchase the basket are categorized as low-income (Human Resources and Social Development Canada 2006). Thresholds are calculated for 19 specific communities and 29 community sizes in ten provinces (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2009).

As demonstrated in Table 4, the MBM thresholds in most provinces are higher for rural communities and small towns under 30,000 people than they are for cities between 30,000 and 100,000 people, thereby reflecting the higher cost of living that can be experienced in these

places (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2009). With these higher thresholds, poverty rates that are based on the MBM are usually higher than the LICO (Klein *et al.* 2008).

Table 4: MBM Thresholds for Reference Family by Component 2007 (\$)

Province	Rural	Less than 30,000	30,000-100,000	Largest Centre**
Newfoundland & Lab.	29,308	29,820	n/a	28,544
Prince Edward Island	28,603	29,465	n/a	30,527
Nova Scotia	29,967	30,245	28,012	29,761
New Brunswick	28,893	29,364	n/a	27,202
Québec	25,861	25,964	24,283	26,560
Ontario	28,440	28,428	26,478	31,729
Manitoba	27,192	28,400	n/a	27,256
Saskatchewan	27,018	28,047	25,596	27,292
Alberta	29,200	30,729	29,355	30,951
British Columbia	29,219	29,395	27,575	31,768

Source: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. 2009. Low Income in Canada: 2000-2007 Using the Market Basket Measure. Ottawa: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

Note**: Largest centres include St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador; Charlottetown, PEI; Halifax, NS; Saint John, NB; Montréal, QC; Toronto, Ontario; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; Calgary, Alberta; and Vancouver, BC.

Some concerns have been raised with the use of MBM thresholds for poverty. Specifically, the MBM is exposed to subjectivity about what to include and exclude in the basket of expenditure items and needs may change over time (Bruce 2007). The price of goods and services will also vary from year to year and will need to be adjusted to reflect changing economic conditions (Osberg 2000). It is also important to note that transportation costs covered under the MBM only include those related to the use of a personal vehicle or public transit (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2009). As many low-income residents in rural and small town places may not have access to either of these forms of transportation, it is important that such measures be adjusted to reflect the goods, services, and infrastructure that are available to rural residents. Furthermore, as many rural residents are required to access goods and services in regional centres, it is unclear how such measures have considered and incorporated these needs into the cost of living.

2.35 Other Approaches to Measuring Poverty

Shelter costs have also been used as a proxy of poverty. In this case, any household that spends more than 30% of their pre-tax income on shelter costs are considered to be living in poverty. Shelter costs include rent or mortgage payments, interest payments, property taxes, condominium charges, and utility payments (Bruce 2003). Others have drawn upon the Census to examine data on government transfers and the incidence of low-income. Economic dependency ratios, for example, have been used to assess a community's dependence on government transfer payments (Bruce 2007). It is calculated as the ratio of transfer payment dollars to every \$100 of employment income reported for the community. The types of government transfer payments that are included in the ratio calculation include Employment Insurance, GST / HST credits, Canada Child Tax Benefits, Old Age Security supplements, the

Canada / Québec Pension Plan, Workers Compensation, Social or Income Assistance, and refundable tax credits.

Other sources of data to measure poverty have included social assistance recipient data; social housing data produced by provincial governments, including waiting lists for social housing; and the numbers of clients using food banks (Canadian Association of Food Banks 2007; Bruce 2007). Again, not everyone who needs social housing will put their name on a wait list or use food banks, particularly in rural and small town places where such options are less likely to exist. Declines in welfare caseloads have been used to measure the success of addressing poverty; however, as Klein *et al.* (2008) argue, declines in caseloads may not mean that people have obtained employment and escaped poverty, but rather that they no longer qualify for continued support.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives developed the ‘living wage’, which is defined as the full-time wage that a household needs to meet their basic living needs (Klein *et al.* 2008). Of interest, to rural researchers, is that it is based on the costs of living for a specific community and can be adapted to rural and small town places. It includes expenses for housing, food, clothing, childcare, recreation, and transportation, but does not account for debt payments or retirement savings. As the costs of living change according to community size, proximity or isolation from larger urban centres, and economic pressures and conditions associated with community growth or decline, the ‘living wage’ needs to be continually updated.

While some research has associated car ownership with good material wealth, Haynes and Gale (2000) argue that such measures are not well suited for rural areas where residents may make sacrifices that affect other aspects of their quality-of-life in order to keep their personal vehicle. As a result, they argue that many measures of deprivation are urban-biased. They suggest that measures of rural deprivation and poverty should include a close examination of the lack of local services, the high cost of living, transportation challenges, limited access to information, limited control over local resources, a lack of anonymity, and stigma that may impact how or if they access supports (Haynes and Gale 2000).

Finally, local governments, service providers, and non-profit groups have attempted to conduct their own Census of the homeless living in their community. Previous research, however, has outlined several limitations with previous attempts to quantify homeless populations in rural and small town places. First, head counts are difficult in rural and small town places that have few shelters or drop-in centres where homeless residents may be contacted (Third 2000). Winter conditions can also make it difficult to track and count homeless people. Due to safety concerns, rough sleepers may also keep their shelter options a secret, making them even more difficult to track. Snap shot homeless counts may be further impacted by the mobile nature of homelessness, such as couch surfing or other temporary forms of accommodations, that may under count the real extent of rough sleeping (O’Connell 2003).

More work needs to be done to develop measures of poverty that are suitable for rural and small town places. Suitable measures must not only reflect the unique infrastructure and limited availability of services in rural and small town places, but should also consider, develop, and be

based upon better quality data that can be easily accessible to local groups in order to guide decisions about program and infrastructure investments.

2.30 Background Documents

An inventory of existing background documents can help to identify local needs and aspirations, as well as available resources and assets to support strategic actions. Key background materials that have been collected include special task force reports, local studies by consultants or other researchers, municipal plans, social service reports, food bank reports, community poverty or homelessness strategies and plans, social housing waiting lists, social planning council reports, and others (Canadian Association of Food Banks 2007; Bruce 2003). A key impediment to assessing local resources and assets is that few rural and small town places have completed studies, strategies, or plans concerning housing, poverty, homelessness, or various social needs (Matte *et al.* 2008).

2.40 Qualitative Methodologies for Studying Rural Poverty

Qualitative approaches are beneficial to researchers as it enables them to obtain a greater understanding of the complex triggers and processes that affect poverty (Millar 2007). As Milbourne (2010: 167) argues, “the multi-dimensional nature of poverty demands more sophisticated modes of research if geographers are to capture the structural underpinnings, statistical significance, and diversity of experience of poverty across different spatial contexts”. This section will assess qualitative approaches to working with vulnerable groups living in poverty in rural areas in order to develop a much deeper understanding of how the nuances of place can influence the pathways into and out of poverty.

2.41 Longitudinal Approaches

Longitudinal approaches to qualitative studies on poverty are beneficial as they provide an opportunity to explore and track changes from one status or situation to another. As Millar (2007: 536) argues, “qualitative longitudinal research can help us to understand how people cope, manage, and adapt to their situation over time, which may also be relevant to understanding the longer-term trajectories that are experienced by individuals and social groups”. In longitudinal studies, data is collected during at least two or more separate time periods, thereby allowing researchers to follow trajectories, explore directional causes or influences, and assess the effects or outcomes of earlier events (Bryman and Teevan 2005). As such, longitudinal approaches may incorporate a retrospective dimension to explore the direction of variables over time (Ruspini 2001). Some longitudinal studies have been criticized for their focus on storytelling or updating inquiries rather than achieving a critical evaluation of change over time (Bryman and Teevan 2005). Higher costs have limited the use of longitudinal, qualitative studies on rural poverty.

A key problem associated with longitudinal studies is the attrition or loss of participants over time. Attrition rates with previous longitudinal studies that have tracked low-income or homeless have ranged from 19-34% (Wong and Piliavan 2001; Wright *et al.* 1995). Some studies have replenished their sample by incorporating new households into the study (Williams

and Whelan 1994); although such an approach has compromised the replicability, reliability, and generalizability of the findings. Other longitudinal studies have interviewed a sub-sample of the original sample population during follow up interviews. Such an approach would be beneficial for studies wishing to probe deeper into key topics of interest.

To limit attrition, studies have used a multi-faceted approach to track participants over time (Wright *et al.* 1995). Questions have been inserted into the first interview session in order to collect information that could be used for tracking purposes, including the address of participants, emergency contacts, family and friends in the area, and hang-outs (Toro *et al.* 1999; Wright *et al.* 1995). Photographs and ID cards of each participant have also been taken to facilitate the tracking process. Telephone calls have been used on a monthly or quarterly basis to connect with participants and prevent the potential loss of participants (Caton *et al.* 2005). Very personalized letters have also been sent via mail to connect with participants, build trust, and keep them informed about ongoing project activities (Wright *et al.* 1995). In addition to site visits to drop-in centres, soup kitchens, and other focal points for low-income residents, researchers have also worked with local social and community services groups that provide services to low-income people to track participants (Wagner *et al.* 1994). Some studies have also offered monthly or quarterly stipends for participants who check in with the research team (Wright *et al.* 1995).

2.42 Retrospective Approaches

Due to difficulties tracking participants over time, some studies have used a retrospective approach to explore how people respond to crisis (Brown and Lichter 2004; Chamberlayne *et al.* 2002). In retrospective studies, data is collected at one point in time. Retrospective studies may include life and work histories (Anderson 2003; Ruspini 2001). A key limitation associated with this approach is the ability of participants to recollect details, particularly for participants who have undergone multiple crises or lead chaotic lifestyles (Third 2000).

2.43 Pathway Approaches

Several researchers have adopted a pathways framework to explore the experiences of people living in poverty (Anderson and Christian 2003; Meert and Bourgeois 2005). Such an approach is beneficial to develop a more holistic, deeper understanding of how various factors, interactions, and policies and programs influence the pathways into and out of poverty. Criticisms of studies that have used a pathways approach are grounded in their failure to track routes out of homelessness (Anderson 2003), as well as their limited documentation of the interaction between low-income residents and various support networks, service providers, and policy mechanisms that influence their ability to cope with or escape poverty (Clapham 2003).

Another concern with previous studies that have used a pathways approach is that they were not grounded in a wider literature and theoretical framework, thereby limiting the researchers' ability to go beyond story-telling or mere description (Clapham 2003). New pathway approaches should be structured to capture the complexities and experiences of rural people living in poverty by going beyond the behavior of the individual and linking their experiences with other social, economic, environmental, and policy-related issues and contexts that influence their experiences

with poverty. This can be a difficult goal to achieve given the number of factors and stakeholders that need to be considered throughout the analysis (Springer-Heinze *et al.* 2003).

2.44 *Ethnographic Approaches*

Ethnographic approaches enable researchers to further contextualize or situate research findings (Cloke *et al.* 2000a). Ethnography is generally understood as the immersion of a researcher into a particular setting for an extended period of time to observe and ask questions about spoken and unspoken behaviours, conversations, and the complexity of interactions between individuals (Bryman and Teevan 2005). In some studies, researchers have moved to rural communities for an extended period of time as a part of the immersion process (Sherman 2006).

Field observations are an important tool in ethnographic research and have been used to document both the context and the interaction between low-income people and other individuals, groups, or service providers in the community (Clapham 2003). Such field observations can reveal hidden rules, insensitivities, or codes of conduct with such vulnerable populations, and are important to further document the experiences of people living in poverty.

2.45 *Selecting Key Informants for Studies on Poverty*

In the context of research on rural poverty, key informant interviews³ have been conducted with municipal staff, elected local government officials, economic development officers, police, hospital administrators and health care workers, mental health and substance abuse agencies, social workers, community organizations, local employment centres, schools, housing authority managers, landlords, shelters, food banks, and other agencies that provide services to people living in poverty (Bruce 2003; Fitchen 1994; Toro *et al.* 1999). Interview local leaders and representatives of such groups is important as they can have considerable power and responsibility to make decisions about the priority, design, and implementation of economic and social policies, and they can play a key role to determine who receives jobs and who receives access to resources and support (Foulkes and Newbold 2008; Jacob *et al.* 1997; Lawson *et al.* 2008). Research teams generally continue to conduct key informant interviews until they reach a saturation point at which researchers are no longer obtaining any new information (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006).

2.46 *Recruiting Low-Income or Homeless Participants*

Several recruitment strategies have been used to recruit low-income residents living in poverty, as well as homeless individuals. Contacting housing and community service agencies that provide services to people living in poverty are the most prominent method used to recruit potential participants (Fitchen 1994; Third 2000; Toro *et al.* 1999; Wagner *et al.* 1994). Third (2000: 454-5) cautions, however, that this introduces bias into the study's sample as this excludes "those who have failed to make contact with the service, or who have been excluded from it". Participants are generally paid a stipend of between \$10 and \$30 for participating in an interview (Altman 2008; Dodson and Schmalzbauer 2005; Zlotnick *et al.* 1999).

³ Key informant interviews are often used to collect knowledge or expertise from individuals that can provide a unique perspective that the researcher is unable to obtain elsewhere (Gilchrist 1999).

2.47 *Developing Trust with Potential Participants*

A key problem for researchers executing field work on rural poverty is that they may be viewed as outsiders. This can impact their ability to recruit and collect reliable information from participants. Members of research teams have volunteered at local drop-in centres or other service agencies targeting low-income groups in order to build trust and familiarity with potential participants (Cloke *et al.* 2000a). These volunteer placements generally begin one year prior to the commencement of the interview portion of the project and continue throughout the duration of the project. Such placements enabled members to be privy to emerging issues, to be able to take observational notes, and to recruit and track potential participants.

Same-gender interviews have also been used due to the sensitive nature of issues that may arise during the interviews (i.e. abuse) (Cloke *et al.* 2000a). Special training is also usually provided to the research team about how far to prompt, as well as how to interact with such vulnerable groups.

2.48 *Interview Techniques*

Driven by considerable debate about the research ethics involving impoverished people, an increasingly acceptable protocol for conducting rural poverty research involves face-to-face interviews (Cloke *et al.* 2000b; 2003; Foulkes and Newbold 2008; Wells 2002). Conducting research about rural poverty involves interacting with individuals who are in crisis and may involve tackling sensitive issues (Cloke *et al.* 2000a; Third 2000). This requires a sensitive approach that can build trust, openness, and understanding between the interview subject and the research team (Anderson 2003; Third 2000). Telephone interviews may not allow the research team to be fully sensitive or appreciate the context of interview subjects (Cloke *et al.* 2000a). Face-to-face contact also allows the researcher to take observational notes during the interview. Observational notes may also be taken during community visits to learn more about how low-income residents are interacting with community supports (Clapham 2003). Furthermore, face-to-face contact is preferred as many low-income rural residents are also unlikely to have a computer, Internet connection, or access to e-mail.

2.49 *Safety and Ethical Issues*

Conducting research on rural poverty may involve interacting with individuals who have a criminal record, engage in negative behaviours, or have drug or alcohol addictions. This can raise safety concerns with the research team. Third (2000) outlines several safety precautions that have also been taken when conducting research on rural poverty. Interviews are usually conducted in pairs and researchers are given strict instructions to check in with a project coordinator multiple times each day. All interviewers are also provided with a mobile phone.

Prior to commencing field work, researchers should also receive specific guidance about how to respond to ethical dilemmas that may be encountered during their work. For example, research assistants can encounter considerable dilemmas when uncovering sensitive or potentially illegal information during an interview (Third 2000). Clear guidelines must be provided about what to

do in terms of reporting information uncovered about fraud, drug use, or involvement in criminal activity. Researchers must also consider how such facts will be represented in their research findings. Clear guidelines must also be given to research assistants who may face dilemmas if participants ask them to provide any additional financial or in-kind support (Cloke *et al.* 2000a).

2.50 Analysis

A key concern in any qualitative study is ensuring rigour and reliability. The transcription of interviews and the use of manifest and latent content analysis will help to improve the rigour and reliability of such studies (Cloke *et al.* 2000a). This will involve multiple rounds of coding by at least two research assistants with each round to be further scrutinized by a lead faculty researcher. Themes from previous studies should provide the basis for latent content analysis to enable the research team to explore deeper meanings within the transcripts (Robinson 1998). In addition to field observational notes, triangulation can be used to compare responses between participants and with previous literature to improve validity (Hycner 1999). Throughout the analysis, researchers must also confront their own biases that may emerge as their own social class status may influence how they interpret a social context.

2.51 Limitations

There are several key limitations that must be considered when interpreting qualitative research on rural poverty. Most notably, research that is grounded in a few cases studies may find it difficult to ascertain which issues are unique to a particular setting and which issues resonate across a broader range of rural and small town places. Bruce (2003) further notes that it can be difficult to isolate issues specific to a case study community due to the strong regional or inter-community relationships and the provision of public services on a regional basis. Different procedures and criteria to access housing and support services can further complicate comparative analysis (Anderson 2003).

2.60 Conclusion

As the rural landscape is very diverse and complex, so too are the ways in which poverty is produced and experienced across different rural and small town places. This review of methodological approaches to studying rural poverty provides a glimpse into the complex approaches and limitations that need to be considered when examining this important topic.

There are significant challenges to conducting research on rural poverty as 'rural' data is generally of poorer quality and more limited. Longitudinal data has also only recently become available to examine topics related to poverty. Many measures for examining poverty continue to be urban-biased as they are based on the needs and availability of services and infrastructure that exist in larger centres. Many of these measures also no longer reflect the opportunities and constraints imposed by new spatial relationships and geographies that have emerged in a restructured neoliberal era that continue to shape the lived experiences of rural poverty.

Furthermore, researchers must develop more engaged, flexible approaches to conducting research in rural and small town places. Despite the complex nature of rural poverty (Cloke *et*

al. 2003), high costs associated with conducting longitudinal research in rural areas has resulted in the inappropriate application of distant, insensitive qualitative approaches. Due to the vulnerability of potential participants and the sensitive nature of issues raised in rural poverty research, a more ethical and personal approach is needed.

3.0 References

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