

## 2. RURAL WOMEN: TO LEAVE OR TO STAY: HOW TO DECIDE?

If you are being abused by an intimate partner, you might be considering a separation. Or maybe you aren't anywhere near making such a decision, but your family or friends keep telling you it's what you have to do. To them the decision might look easy. But if you have stayed with a partner for a while, there are probably good reasons for it. Maybe some bad reasons too. It is sometimes hard to know the difference. An abusive partner can be both the best and the worst husband or lover. From outside the relationship, your sister or friend might only see the best, and wonder why you are "complaining." Or she might only see the worst, and be puzzled over why you don't "just leave." Making the decision is up to you, because you are the one who pays the price for staying or leaving, and only you know what is valuable about the relationship. Only you know whether it is dangerous or damaging to you or your children.

Thinking about leaving home permanently might scare you. Thinking about it doesn't mean you have to do it. But imagining what it would be like to leave can help you decide whether it is the right thing to do or not. And picturing your life if you stay another year or ten or twenty can also help you compare the two possibilities. Maybe you believe that if you separate from the abuser you have to also leave your immediate community or that you will have to give up your attachment to the land. That might be so. But before you decide that for sure, explore the alternatives. Consider, for instance, moving to another rural town where you will be safe. It could be a place that has many of the things you love about your home town.

Consider each thing you hate to leave at home. Can you find it somewhere else? Then ask yourself what scares you about moving to a new community. Are you thinking about a really big city? You might move to another small town. Or a city that is not so big it makes you nervous. Once you know what scares you, then you can find out more about it. You might even discover something about it that you like.

### Leaving or Staying: a Balancing Act

Leaving rural home for a city		Staying in my home	
Good	Bad	Good	Bad
<i>1. Being safe</i>	<i>Leaving my animals</i>	<i>I'm on the land</i>	<i>Risking my life</i>
<i>2. More jobs</i>	<i>Many strangers</i>	<i>It's what I know</i>	<i>Living with fear</i>
3. _____	_____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____	_____
5. _____	_____	_____	_____
6. _____	_____	_____	_____

When you think of making a big move, you might get stuck on what you would lose. But try to think, as well, of what you could gain in the new place. In a city, paradoxically, the same loss might also be a gain. Consider, for instance, “Many strangers.” The positive side is that when police officers and judges are “strangers” they won’t know your husband’s family. The negative is that strangers pay little attention to you. But that can have an upside too. You might be much safer where no one notices you. No one can tell the abuser where you are. Try hard to list the positive and negative aspects of both staying in the country and leaving for a city. Then consider a town that offers transportation, good jobs or a community college. Ask the same questions about it.

Maybe you’ve never lived in a city or bigger town. You don’t know how it would be for you. Put a question mark beside the items you think you would like. And a check mark by ones you’re afraid you wouldn’t like. See how the two sides measure up. How many question marks are there? Maybe some things are so important they outweigh everything else. Your safety might be one of them. Are you willing to leave everything you love to ensure your safety? Are you willing to risk serious injury or even death, rather than leave your family and home? Who can you talk to about these difficult decisions?

### **Who is the best person to talk to about what is happening to you?**

It could be useful to discuss your situation with a friend or family member. Consulting a doctor, lawyer or counselor might help too. But sometimes it is hard to get your family, friends or your family doctor to understand what is being done to you. Maybe you have been careful not to confide in them earlier, so they find it hard to believe what you tell them now. If they have a positive relationship with your partner, they might not want to hear bad things about him. If one of them blames you for what is done to you or doesn’t believe you, then you might be reluctant to confide in anyone else. If you are in a relationship with an abusive person, not telling anyone what is done to you can put in you in even more danger.

So before you ask someone you know for help, try to find out how she or he feels about abuse of women in general. Listen carefully to whether the answer is something like, “Well a woman like that must have done something to deserve it.” Or, “If it’s that bad, she should just get out.” This is not the time to argue the point. It is more likely a time to find someone else you can trust – someone who understands how complex such a decision can be.

In my books, *Getting Free* and *You Can Be Free* you can find checklists and information to help you make crucial decisions. But it might not be safe to take home a book about abuse. If it is safe to use the phone, you might prefer to call someone who is not part of your family or personal community. A domestic violence advocate at a shelter or on a hotline is the most likely person to give you information you need. Every bit of information you get, increases your control over your life. Click here for information on [How an Advocates Can Help](#).

Adapted from You Can Be Free (<http://www.powells.com/>)

