



"I had my first son in the refuge – that was 11 years ago when I suffered from domestic violence. I went to university, got my degree, and then I felt like giving it back. Therefore, I work in the refuge."



# why women?

The women's voluntary and community sector:  
changing lives  
changing communities  
changing society



"I see women blossom, just from coming and feeling equal to others, and not being passive recipients of a day service, but actually coming to a group that they feel they own and belong to."

"The Rape Crisis Centre had to close because they couldn't get funding. We see the figures for rape going up year-on-year and we see the convictions going down year-on-year. What does that tell any of us about governmental priorities?"

"Women-only spaces and women's organisations are still being undermined through lack of funding. The pressure is being piled on the existing ones which means that they are not going to have the resources to continue."



"People came here unable to acknowledge their HIV status and they moved on through our services into having breakfast with the PM and telling him to put more money into microbicides research and things like that."

**why women?**

support women's organisations to change lives



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**The women's voluntary and community sector:  
changing lives  
changing communities  
changing society**

Women's Resource Centre

2006

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# Executive summary

## 1 Introduction

The Women's Resource Centre initiated this study to explore the question that many women's organisations are asked time and time again – "why women?" Today, perceptions that women and men are now equal are stronger and more widespread than ever, despite evidence to the contrary.

## 2 Research method

This study used semi-structured interviews with workers from 44 women's voluntary and community organisations, as well as analysis of data from annual reports and evaluations of the organisations. In addition, a brief literature review was carried out, looking at previous research on women's organisations, and recent studies on the position of women in the UK. The aims of this research project were:

- To explore why women's organisations exist and the problems they work to address.
- To provide evidence for the need for women's organisations, including the long-term impact on service users.
- To explore the 'added value' of women's organisations.
- To explore the links between women's organisations working in different fields (e.g. violence, drugs/alcohol, employment etc).
- To explore the barriers facing women's organisations that impede their work.

There has been little quantitative or large-scale research into the women's voluntary and community sector in the UK. However, studies have looked at the social and economic impact of women's centres (Taillon, 2000); highlighted the persistent under-funding of the women's sector and under-prioritisation of women's needs in public policy (Soteri, 2001; Hodgson, 2004; Davis and Cooke, 2002); and found that black and minority ethnic organisations are more likely to close or move and experience a less secure existence than other groups within the voluntary sector (Davis and Cooke, 2002). This study uses interviews with women's organisations to draw together some of the 'evidence of need' that women's organisations are often asked to provide, and to highlight the work that they are doing.

## 3 Problems – women's inequality

### **Overview of research into women's inequality in the UK**

Despite major developments in the last forty years such as the Sex Discrimination Act, the legalisation of abortion and the criminalisation of rape in marriage, women's inequality is still deeply entrenched in the UK.

*45% of all women in the UK have experienced some form of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking*

This is evident in indicators including:

- The gender pay gap in the UK is one of the highest in Europe (Bellamy and Rake, 2005) and recent women graduates earn 15% less than men who have the same qualifications (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2004).
- Almost half (45%) of all women in the UK have experienced some form of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking (Home Office, 2005a). The proportion of rape allegations resulting in a conviction has dropped from 24% in 1985 to 5.6% in 2002 (Kelly et al, 2005).
- The cost of domestic violence to the state, employers and individuals is estimated to be £22.9 billion per year (Walby, 2004).
- The number of women in prison rose threefold between 1993 and 2003, while 70% of women prisoners experience mental health problems and half have been victims of sexual abuse (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).

### **Problems described by women's organisations**

In this study, interviewees from women's organisations were asked to describe the social problems they work to address, and asked about the gendered nature of these problems, i.e. how these issues affect women differently from men. Their responses illustrate the effects of the headline statistics above on individual women's lives, and highlight the complex nature of problems such as sexual abuse and multiple discrimination. They discussed the following issues:

- Violence against women.
- Dependency making women vulnerable.
- 'No recourse to public funds' rule.
- Extreme poverty.
- Mental health problems.
- Multiple oppression.
- Employment discrimination.
- Institutional sexism – gender neutral policy fails women.
- Exclusion from high-level decision-making.

## **4 Solutions – what women's organisations do**

The women's organisations in this study provided a wide and varied range of activities from front-line services to capacity building of other voluntary and community organisations to policy and campaigning.

Four categories of organisations began to emerge: front-line, small community groups, second tiers and campaigning organisations. The majority of organisations overlapped categories.

Five organisations were selected from the 44 interviewed in the study to illustrate the types of services and activities delivered.

**Positively Women** is an organisation led by and for HIV positive women offering a structured volunteer programme which encourages ex-service users to work within the organisation. Service users often move to the support group and then are likely to become a volunteer or a paid member of staff.

**Tower Hamlets Women's Aid** provides a combination of crisis and community services for women affected by domestic violence. Whilst the refuge service ensures that women are safe from perpetrators of violence in the short-term through offering temporary accommodation, the community services ensure that women have access to information and support to enable them make informed decisions about their lives and achieve long-term outcomes of living without violence.

**Hillingdon Women's Centre (HWC)** is part of a long tradition of women-only spaces and women's centres which came into being in the 1970s and 1980s. It provides an integrated approach which broadens the scope of service provision to women, ensuring that service users are offered support in a variety of different ways. HWC caters for needs that women in the community have identified themselves and this needs-based approach has meant that the centre has been a women-only space since its inception.

*despite its very limited resources, the BWMHP has supported many women during their recovery from mental illness, helping them to maintain good mental health and progress into community participation, education and employment*

**The Black Women's Mental Health Project (BWMHP)** is a self-help group run by one part-time paid worker, volunteers and social work students on placement. BWMHP provides home visits, hospital visits, emotional support, referrals to counselling and a helpline. The staff and volunteers regularly visit all the women patients in the local mental health trust hospital and participate in national debates and consultations on mental health issues. Despite its very limited resources, the BWMHP has supported many women during their recovery from mental illness, helping them to maintain good mental health and progress into community participation, education and employment.

**The Women's Environmental Network (WEN)** was founded by women who felt that women's environmental concerns were marginalised and ignored. WEN is a campaigning organisation which enables individuals to use their consumer power as a force for positive environmental change, by informing, educating and empowering women and men. WEN has had a successful campaigning history.

## 5 Solutions – the impact of women's organisations

### **Changing lives – the impact on women**

The interviewees gave numerous examples of how women's lives have been transformed by the work of the organisation. Impacts included long-term freedom from violence, improved mental health, and economic independence through training and employment.

"Women's lives have been completely controlled by their violent partner. [...] When they've left here, they have been able to manage their own affairs, they have been able to deal with their own children, they've been able to run their lives and that's a huge impact on their life." (Tower Hamlets Women's Aid)

### **Changing communities – the impact on communities**

The organisations in this study also spoke about the impact of their work on women's families and communities, for example children being able to be looked after by their parents rather than social services, and women playing more active roles in their communities.

"Women end up in much more fulfilled positions in their lives both in work and in relationship terms and are therefore better mothers, better sisters and better workers. But also they are able to contribute to their community in the broadest possible way - by

being better neighbours and better volunteers. I think it is also not uncommon for them to leave the role of victim and help someone else along." (Haringey Women's Forum)

### **Changing society – the impact on government**

Historically, women's organisations have made enormous contributions to the transformation of society in the UK, for example by lobbying for laws to protect women and children and by winning the right to vote. Data from the interviews in this study indicate that women's organisations today continue to advocate on behalf of women and achieve important changes to policy and practice. Achievements included:

- Improved access to domestic violence services for disabled women.
- Employee rights for migrant domestic workers.
- Increased protection for trafficked women and asylum seekers.

## **6 Solutions – the added value of the women's voluntary sector**

From the interviews, the key features of women's organisations that emerged are:

- Provision of women-only space.
- Focus on empowerment and independence.
- Service user involvement and high level of peer support.
- Integrated 'one-stop-shop' service.
- Needs-based approach.
- Reaching 'hard to reach' women.

### **Provision of women-only space**

The most obvious feature that women's organisations provide that is rarely offered by mainstream organisations is women-only space, whether for service users or those running the organisation.

"There are women that I have known for 10-15 years, and I've seen what Powerhouse has done for them in terms of the confidence and the growth. I don't think that would have been achieved if it wasn't a women-only space." (Powerhouse)

One interviewee described the experience of a woman who had tried to access support from a mainstream voluntary and community organisation:

*"He gave her half an hour of his time and told her she had to 'get on with her life', that was probably 'the best thing for her'. This was quite appalling"*

"[A woman who had been raped] had gone to one of the larger mainstream organisations and she said she got to speak to a male volunteer there. He gave her half an hour of his time and told her she had to 'get on with her life', that was probably 'the best thing for her'. This was quite appalling. [...] These mainstream organisations are often quite well funded and well respected but on the ground the experience is somewhat different, depending obviously on which branch you go to." (Anonymous)

### **Focus on empowerment and independence**

Twenty-one organisations (48%) refer to empowerment of the women they work with. Empowerment was often described as the process whereby women become able to advocate for themselves:

"Success is a woman who actually feels able to articulate her own needs. So she's not only taking what you offer, but she's actually able to say is.'What I need for me is...' " (women@thewell)

### **Service user involvement and high level of peer support**

The peer-support or self-help element was central to many organisations in this study. Five (11%) of the interviewees – usually managers of the organisations – were ex-service users themselves. Their experience offers invaluable insight into the benefits of ex-service user involvement in women's organisations:

*"At that time I didn't know my rights as a woman. [My husband] told me if I called the police they would deport me, and I believed him. So now, I let women know that they have rights as a human being, as a citizen"*

"I am an ex-service user. I had my first son in the refuge – that was 11 years ago, when I suffered from domestic violence. I was pregnant at the time and my midwife called the police and they put me in a refuge. I had my son in the refuge. I didn't have my immigration papers, and my husband didn't want to give them to me – he was abusing me physically, financially. I was damaged. From the refuge I was able to get my indefinite leave to remain. I went to university, got my degree, and then I felt like giving it back. Therefore, I work here. So I'm a living example. At that time I didn't know my rights as a woman. [My husband] told me if I called the police they would deport me, and I believed him. So now, I let women know that they have rights as a human being, as a citizen." (Elevate)

### **Needs-based services**

Twenty per cent of organisations in this study offered a wide range of different services all under one roof. They performed the function of a traditional 'women's centre', although most did not use that description. It was not uncommon for organisations with under ten staff (sometimes under five) to provide support on domestic violence and rape crisis, benefits information, legal and immigration advice, interpretation, training, pregnancy testing, job search support, and to run support groups.

"They are looking for an organisation that does more than one thing and therefore can unwrap any and many of their various problems. They can be in more than one of our services at once, they can be in our counselling programme at the same time as having their housing dealt with, and I think that's really reassuring for them...they can come to the same building once a week and they get to know the staff and build a rapport with them." (Haringey Women's Forum)

### **Reaching the 'hard to reach'**

Because of the ways women's organisations work – providing women-only space, strong connections between service users and staff, needs-based services – they often work successfully with women that are not accessing other services. For example:

"In our experience young women that have been 'written off by the system', that are in care, seen as challenging, disruptive etc provide very positive feedback on SERICC's services. We believe this is because we work from a women-centred approach, using language that they feel comfortable with, they don't feel judged. Often when these young women are referred from statutory services we are told that they're 'trouble makers', they are 'aggressive', they do this, they do that, they won't turn up, and they'll muck you about. We have had none of these problems with any of the young women. It's obviously linked to the way you actually work and the way you present yourself as a service." (South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre)

## 7 Barriers – women's organisations' exclusion from funding

This research identified barriers women's organisations face, in common with the rest of the voluntary and community sector, which were:

- Short-term funding.
- Limited capacity for fundraising and bureaucracy.
- Funders' failure to implement full-cost recovery.
- Increased competition for funding.
- Premises.

However, the interviews also identified barriers that are specific to women's organisations such as the lack of political priority given to women/gender, policy failing to meet women's needs and a lack of awareness of the women's sector. These were:

*women's organisations are reporting that gender equality and women's issues have disappeared off the political agenda*

### **Gender not on the agenda**

Increasingly, women's organisations are reporting that gender equality and women's issues have disappeared off the political agenda. Many of the interviewees believed that there exists a widely held view that women and men are equal, despite the persistent and overwhelming evidence to the contrary

"Women-only organisations are not seen as necessary anymore. There is some sort of blindness going on in society, a lot of people don't see the need for a women-only centre [...] I don't know why that is because I know the abuse of women and girls is much worse now." (Women's Alcohol Centre/Alcohol Recovery Project)

### **Policy is failing women and is impacting on funding**

This study found a clear link between policy decisions and their impact on funding. Women's organisations identified both the importance of women's sector representation on decision making bodies and of ongoing engagement with government to influence its public policy decisions. For example, organisations commented that although domestic violence is now recognised as important (after decades of lobbying), sexual violence almost never appears on funding criteria, although there is a clear need for rape and sexual assault services.

### **Lack of recognition and awareness of the women's sector**

Many of the research participants spoke about the lack of recognition and awareness of what women's organisations do and/or why they exist. They felt that women's organisations are routinely overlooked and marginalised because they are women's organisations.

"Whatever we do or try to put forward, it's initially judged by the fact that it's a women's organisation, so already people make assumptions – they've got their own way of measuring the standards of women's organisations and that in itself leads to being discriminated against when it comes to accessing big pots of funding." (Zimbabwe Women's Network)

## 8 Conclusion and recommendations

This research has illustrated how women's organisations transform women's lives and society, and found that the key features of women's organisations that make them effective include the provision of women-only services, focus on empowerment and a high level of self-help and service user involvement. Women's organisations often work at 'grass roots' level with the most marginalised people in society and are usually established because a need is identified where mainstream services are inappropriate or non-existent. They have proved to be powerful agents for social change – adding considerable value to the government's equalities agenda by reaching women and their families otherwise inaccessible to government agencies or who have fallen through the 'safety net'.

*interviewees reported a lack of political will for the outcomes they are seeking to achieve because of the myth that women's inequality is no longer a problem*

However, the unique contribution of women's organisations to the welfare of society is under threat. The interviews in this study indicated serious and worsening funding problems for the women's voluntary and community sector. Some of these problems are in common with other community groups, such as short-term, insecure funding and the failure of funders to implement full cost recovery. But other barriers holding women's organisations back from achieving their full potential are unique to this sector. Interviewees reported a lack of political will for the outcomes they are seeking to achieve because of the myth that women's inequality is no longer a problem.

The government must ensure gender is firmly reinstated on the political agenda. It must acknowledge the systematic disadvantage women face because of their gender and publicly recognise the essential services and expertise the women's sector provides to address this.

### Recommendations

- The Home Office should develop a cross-departmental strategy on sustaining the women's sector. This should include:
  - A commitment to adequately resource the women's sector engagement with government.
  - A women's sector funding needs analysis, with particular attention to women's organisations led by and for: lesbian, bisexual and transgender; black and minority ethnic; disabled; younger and older women; women's faith and other marginalised women's organisations.
  - Research to measure the economic impact of the women's sector.
  - A commitment to invest in women's organisations through retaining grant giving, not just 'buying' services from them.
- The Treasury should carry out regular gender and other equalities analyses of spending on the voluntary and community sector, including the Invest to Save, *futurebuilders*, and Capacity Builders programmes.
- The Treasury should explicitly address funding for women's organisations, and other equalities organisations, in its forthcoming revised guidance on financial relationships with the 'third sector'.
- The Home Office, Office of Government Commerce and Equal Opportunities Commission should produce guidance to help public bodies ensure that procurement and other funding for the voluntary sector does not unfairly exclude women's organisations and other marginalised groups.
- The Home Office and Compact Working Group should jointly assess how well the Compact and Compact Plus meet the needs of women's organisations.

- The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Local Government Association should provide guidance to local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships on working with the women's sector and other equalities groups.
- Local authorities should carry out regular gender and other equalities analyses of local funding for the voluntary and community sector.
- Local Strategic Partnerships should ensure that women's organisations are actively involved in developing their local Sustainable Community Strategy and the priorities for their local area.
- The National Audit Office should undertake a second audit of the relationship between public bodies and the voluntary and community sector, with particular attention to women's; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender; age-based; black and minority ethnic; faith; and disability-led organisations.
- The Women and Equality Unit, Equal Opportunities Commission and Commission for Equality and Human Rights should state publicly and explicitly that the Gender Equality Duty requires public bodies to consult with women's organisations as stakeholders and experts in promoting gender equality.
- The Commission on Equality and Human Rights should provide guidance to public bodies on working with women's; disability-led; age-based; black and minority ethnic; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender; and faith organisations.
- The Commission on Equality and Human Rights should have equitable ringfenced funding for gender equality, all other equalities groups.
- Government funders should collect and analyse gender and other equalities disaggregated data on service users, volunteers and employees from the voluntary and community organisations they fund.
- Funders should name 'women' as a priority group in funding criteria when targeting equalities groups and in needs assessments.
- Funders should ensure that they fund advocacy, campaigning and policy.
- Public bodies should conduct gender and other equalities impact assessments of proposed changes to funding policy, to assess how they affect the women's sector and other equalities groups.
- Public bodies should improve their expertise on gender equality and deliver gender training to all staff.
- Public bodies should conduct gender impact assessments (disaggregated data) on public services, employment and policy. Race, disability, sexuality, age, religion and income impact assessments should also be carried out and all statistics disaggregated by gender.
- The inspectorate bodies (such as the National Audit Office, Audit Commission and Ofsted) should meet their requirements under the forthcoming Gender Equality Duty by ensuring all auditing of public bodies includes equalities disaggregated data and gender impact assessments.
- The government should set and achieve a new date by which all statutory funders should adopt Full Cost Recovery as a standard model [since April 2006 target has not been met].
- The government should develop, fund and implement a cross-departmental, national Gender Equality Strategy and a national Violence Against Women Strategy.
- The Home Office should either repeal the 'no recourse to public funds' rule or provide adequate funding to cover the costs to women's refuges and individual women created by the rule.
- The government should safeguard the provision of single-sex services in the voluntary sector by clarifying the current inconsistencies between the Sex Discrimination Act, European regulations and the Equality Bill.

# 1 Introduction

The Women's Resource Centre initiated this study to explore the question that many women's organisations are being (increasingly and repeatedly) asked, "why women?"

*perceptions that women and men are now equal are stronger and more widespread than ever*

Today, perceptions that women and men are now equal are stronger and more widespread than ever. These perceptions lead to women's organisations being asked to justify why they are women-only, or why a specific women's service or group is needed.

The Women's Resource Centre decided to ask employees and volunteers of women's organisations:

- Why do you focus on women?
- What problems are you trying to address?
- How do these problems affect women differently from men?

We wanted to document the responses that women's organisations are often asked to give to funders and others. The study also explores how women's organisations work to address these problems, and looks at some of the characteristic ways of working that women's groups have in common. It discusses the 'added value' of the women's voluntary and community sector.

## 1.1 Structure of the report

- Chapter 2 gives a brief outline of existing research into the women's voluntary and community sector, and explains the interview method used in this study.
- Chapter 3 focuses on the problems that women's organisations address, by first summarising existing research and statistics on women's inequality, then outlining the findings from the interviews in this study
- Chapters 4, 5 and 6 cover the solutions that women's organisations offer to these social problems.
- Chapter 4 summarises the main activities of organisations interviewed in this research, and gives profiles of five organisations to present the range of work women's organisations do.
- Chapter 5 looks at the impact of all the interviewed organisations on individual women's lives, on families and communities, and finally on wider society.
- Chapter 6 then explores at the 'added value' of women's organisations, i.e. the key features and services of women's organisations that are not available elsewhere.
- Chapter 7 turns to the barriers facing women's organisations, which impedes on their ability to carry out their work, with a particular focus on the worsening funding problems the sector is currently facing.
- Finally, Chapter 8 draws together the conclusions from the report and makes recommendations based on the interviews in this study.

## 2 Research method

This chapter gives an overview of existing research into the women's voluntary and community sector and outlines the research aims and method used in this study.

### 2.1 Overview of existing research into the women's sector

There are over 11,000 registered charities in the UK that specifically work with women, making up 7% of all registered charities (based on Guidestar search, [www.guidestar.org.uk](http://www.guidestar.org.uk)). There are many other women's community groups not registered with the Charity Commission. However, little research into the voluntary and community sector looks at gender equality or breaks down data on women's organisations.

*"political rhetoric about women's equality fails to be matched by public investment in women's organisations"*

Existing research highlights the persistent under-funding of women's organisations. As Riordan (1999) notes, "political rhetoric about women's equality fails to be matched by public investment in women's organisations". Soteri's study of women's organisations in London found that half operated on less than £100,000 per annum and 19% on less than £10,000 and that 18% of organisations had no paid staff (Soteri 2001).

Furthermore, studies have shown that organisations led by black and minority ethnic (BME) women, refugee women, lesbians and disabled women are particularly marginalised in terms of funding and political influence. Davis and Cooke (2002) highlight the fact that local authorities and funders often operate within a rigid 'hierarchy of need' in which Black women's needs are dealt with in the order 'race, then gender', rather than addressing her specific needs as a Black woman, and that a similar dynamic operates with refugee women.

This approach by funders is exacerbated by the way funding is distributed to the voluntary sector, which forces women's organisations to frame their funding applications within the "paradigms of need recognised by funders" (Hodgson, 2004, p.10) – paradigms that recognise neither the systematic discrimination experienced by women as a group, nor the overlapping and multiple discriminations experienced by (for example) black, minority ethnic and refugee women, lesbians and disabled women.

There has been little quantitative or large-scale research on the impact of the women's voluntary sector. However, one study into the social and economic impact of women's centres in Belfast (Taillon, 2000) found that not only did the centres provide effective support services covering issues like sexual and domestic violence, self harm and social security advice to some of the most vulnerable women in the community; they also played an important role in the local economy. Centres provided childcare enabling women to take up training and employment opportunities, and acted as a gateway to employment, with 40% of their employees having previously been volunteers or users at the centre.

## 2.2 Aims of this research

The study used semi-structured interviews with workers from 44 women's voluntary and community organisations, as well as analysis of data from annual reports and evaluations of the organisations interviewed. In addition, a brief literature review was carried out, looking at previous research on women's organisations, and recent studies on the position of women in the UK. The aims of this research project were:

- To explore why women's organisations exist and the problems they work to address.
- To provide evidence for the need for women's organisations, including the long-term impact on service users.
- To explore the 'added value' of women's organisations.
- To explore the links between women's organisations working in different fields (e.g. violence, drugs/alcohol, employment etc).
- To explore the barriers facing women's organisations that impedes their work.

## 2.3 Definition of a 'women's organisation'

This study uses a definition of a women's organisation as developed by Riordan (1999) as: "organisations that seek to improve the status and situation of women". The study is limited to organisations in the voluntary and community sector, defined by NCVO (Wilding et al, 2004) as "[including] registered charities, as well as non-charitable non-profit organisations (e.g. Amnesty International), associations, self-help groups and community groups. Typically, organisations belonging to this group have a discernable public benefit and benefit from some aspect of volunteerism."

The research includes women's projects within not-for-profit organisations with a broader remit if the women's project is staffed by women. This might include for example, a refugee women's project within a wider refugee organisation, or a domestic violence project in a housing association.

## 2.4 Interview method

### **Interview questions and script**

The interview questions were developed to address the research aims above. They are designed to specifically address the issues particular to women's organisations, which are not covered in research on the voluntary sector as a whole. For example, interviewees were explicitly asked whether the organisation had a women-only service and why or why not. Prompt questions were used to elicit further detail if the initial answer the interviewee gave was brief, although often the prompts were not necessary. The interview questions (see Appendix 2) were structured as follows:

1. Brief details about the organisation
2. Work of the organisation in more depth
3. Influencing government
4. Funding
5. Wrap up

### **Recruiting participants**

The research was publicised to women's organisations using voluntary sector newsletters, websites and mailing lists accessed mainly by the women's voluntary and community sector in London. Some interviewees put themselves forward as a result of the publicity, although the majority were approached proactively by the researchers. The study used the Women's Resource Centre's comprehensive database of women's organisations to provide an initial list of organisations to contact. This database contains over 700 organisations and was developed during a previous mapping study of the women's sector (Women's Resource Centre, 2003). Any organisations on the database that were not in the voluntary sector or did not have women's projects were eliminated and not contacted. Using the 'snowball' method, each interviewee was asked to suggest other organisations that may be interested in being interviewed who were contacted if they fitted the research criteria.

The study aimed to include a diverse range of organisations that represent a cross-section of the fields of work and communities that women's organisations work with and for. However, the interviewees were not intended to be a random sample of women's organisations because the number of interviews would make it impossible to achieve a truly representative sample. Organisations were targeted to ensure a wide spread of the following:

- Equalities groups (i.e. black and minority ethnic, refugee, lesbian/bisexual, disabled, older, younger, minority religious groups)
- Field of work (e.g. violence against women - including sexual violence - mental health, advice, advocacy, immigration)
- Size of organisation, measured by annual income and number of paid staff – to ensure the interviewees included some small organisations (fewer than three staff) and some larger organisations.

A profile of the organisations interviewed is detailed later in section 2.5, and a list of interviewees is included as Appendix 1. Interviewees were asked to provide copies of any service or impact evaluations they had previously carried out, and these were analysed in addition to the interview data.

### **Interviewer training**

The interviews were carried out by WRC staff and volunteers, who all received training on conducting interviews. The training covered background on the women's sector; research ethics; informed consent; interviewee access to data and to this report; non-leading questions; prompting (e.g. "can you tell me more about that"); recording; and transcription.

### **Research ethics**

The ethical issues that arise in this research project concern the informed consent of the interviewees, and issues around the amount of time interviewees would need to take from their day-to-day work to participate in the project. Time constraints are of particular concern in the women's voluntary and community sector because workers often have little or no spare capacity for strategic or policy work and/or research. Interviewees were given the opportunity to be credited in the research so that the publicity it offers would benefit the organisation, and it was made clear to them how long the interview would take.

*Time constraints are of particular concern in the women's voluntary and community sector because workers often have little or no spare capacity for strategic or policy work and/or research*

### **Informed consent**

Informed consent was agreed over the phone (for telephone interviews) and by signing a consent form (for face-to-face interviews). Participants were made aware that the data may be used in this project and other research related to WRC's why women? campaign, for the purposes of providing evidence about women's organisations. Participants were given the option of keeping all or part of their data anonymous. Four interviewees chose to remain anonymous. All interviewees were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and were asked if they were happy for the interview to be recorded, and all participants consented. The audio data was used for the purpose of writing up all or part of the interview, and will be deleted within 12 months of the interview and will not be used for any purpose other than verification. If requested, participants were sent a copy of their interview transcript, allowing them to check, amend and confirm its contents, and whether they wished to be identified or remain anonymous. Nineteen organisations asked to see a copy of the transcript. Of these, 14 interviewees made minor amendments and one participant withdrew their interview from the research. Interviewees were not paid for participating in the research. Their organisation is acknowledged in this report unless they wished to remain anonymous. They were also offered a copy of the finished report.

## 2.5 Profile of research participants

This report is based on interviews conducted with workers from 44 women's community and voluntary sector organisations, seven of which were done in person and the remainder by phone. The length of interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 120 minutes, with an average interview time of 44 minutes per interview and a total of 33 hours of interview data was collected.

### **Role of interviewee within organisation**

Seventy-five per cent of interviewees fulfilled a managerial role within their organisations, either as directors and managers of organisations, or project co-ordinators. The remainder included refuge workers, a youth work manager, and trustees of the organisations. Six out of the 44 women interviewed performed voluntary (unpaid) functions within their organisations.

### **Equalities-led organisations**

Thirty per cent (13) of the interviewees worked in organisations run by and for black, minority ethnic or refugee women, three were run by and for disabled women, and two by lesbian and bisexual women. One was an older women's organisation, and one was a young women's organisation.

### **Organisations' fields of work**

The fields of work of the organisations included environmental issues, advice/advocacy, prisoners/ex-prisoners, asylum-seekers/refugees, alcohol misuse, education/training, health, housing, mental health and youth work. For 82% of organisations, violence against women was a significant part of their work, including sexual violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. The main activities of the organisations are outlined in Chapter 4.

*For 82% of organisations, violence against women was a significant part of their work*

### Size of organisations

The table below shows the annual income of organisations interviewed. Annual income ranged from zero (organisations that were not funded) to over £400,000.

Annual income	No. of organisations
Not funded	5
<£10,000	3
£10,001-50,000	5
£50,001-100,000	4
£100,001-200,000	8
<b>£200,001-300,000</b>	<b>11</b>
£300,001-400,000	3
>£400,001	6

Six organisations (11%) had no paid staff, relying solely on volunteers for the running of their organisations or projects. The majority of organisations (73%) employed ten members of staff or less and just one organisation employed more than 40 members of staff.

See Appendix 1 for the list of organisations interviewed.

# 3 Problems – women's inequality

This chapter gives an overview of indicators of women's inequality in the UK from other research, and then uses the data from this study to illustrate the impact of these problems on the lives of women and their families.

## 3.1 Overview of research into women's inequality in the UK

It is an interesting time for participants and observers of discussions and debates about equalities issues. Equalities issues are being discussed, yet 'gender' is rarely properly understood and (very) often lacks informed analysis of women's inequality.

### **Pay gap and poverty**

Women make up half of the British workforce and although women have been entering the workforce in increasing numbers, with 70% of women in employment (Bellamy and Rake, 2005), their average earnings are still greatly lagging behind those of men. The gender pay gap in the UK is one of the highest in Europe: women who work part-time earn just 59% of men's part-time hourly pay and women who work full-time earn 82% of the male average hourly wage (Bellamy and Rake, 2005). Even in the voluntary sector, which is generally perceived to lead the way in promoting equality, women earn 87% of men's (full-time) wages with an average salary that lags more than £3,400 behind that of men (Third Sector, 2005). The pay gap, which has changed little in the past 25 years, is not only affecting those women who have few qualifications, but also graduates, who earn 15% less than men who have the same qualifications within five years of graduation (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2004).

*Minority ethnic women earn the least with a total income of £118 per week, or 59% of minority ethnic men's earnings and just 32% of white men's earnings*

Black and minority ethnic (BME) women have been especially affected by a disproportionate income distribution. Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are at least three times more likely to be unemployed than white women (Botcherby and Hurrell, 2004). Seventy per cent of all people from black and minority ethnic communities live in the 88 most deprived local authority districts in the UK, compared with 40% of the greater population (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004). Overall, the median total weekly income for white women is £135 per week, which is only 49% of white men's median weekly earnings of £276. Minority ethnic women earn the least with a total income of £118 per week, or 59% of minority ethnic men's earnings and just 32% of white men's earnings (Botcherby and Hurrell, 2004). Disabled women also face disproportionately high levels of unemployment and low pay – 52% of working age women with long term disabilities are 'economically inactive' compared to 21% of all working age women (Dench et al, 2002).

Like men, women face exclusion from the labour market due to low skills, previous unemployment or a lack of regional opportunities. But in addition women face lower wages and pregnancy discrimination and are more likely to suffer sex discrimination and have less access to promotion. About 30,000 women in the UK leave their jobs each year

because of pregnancy discrimination (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005), and women in full-time employment spend nearly 30% more time on childcare every day than men in full-time employment (Bellamy and Rake, 2005).

These gender disparities impact on poverty rates. Only three out of ten women of working age are currently saving towards their retirement, compared with more than half of men; while half of women who were saving, stop doing so when they have children (Scottish Widows, 2005). Women often deny themselves basics, such as food, in order to protect their families and act as buffers in poor households (Rosenblatt and Rake, 2003). Research often does not detail how the family income has been redistributed, and this can conceal women who live in poverty even when the household income is above the poverty line.

### **Violence against women**

"'Violence against women' refers to any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life." (Beijing Platform for Action, 1995)

Domestic violence, sexual violence, forced marriage, stalking, female genital mutilation (FGM), exploitation in sex-work and honour killings all constitute human rights violations against women and continue to occur in the UK, often with little protection or access to justice.

The British Crime Survey showed that 45% of women in the UK have experienced some form of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking (Walby and Allen, 2004) and domestic violence has been identified as a prime cause of miscarriage or still-birth (Mezey, 1997). Although domestic violence is not limited to women or to heterosexual relationships, the vast majority of victims are women who have been abused by their male partners. Recent research shows that gender is likely to affect the type of abuse that is experienced. Female victims of abuse are more likely to be injured, more likely to be frightened, more likely to be repeatedly abused and more likely to be murdered than male victims. The oft-quoted figure of one in four women and one in six men having experienced violence misrepresents the real picture: 47% of male victims of domestic violence have experienced single incidents of abuse, compared to only 27% of female victims in the UK (Greater London Authority, 2005).

*cases of rape resulting in a conviction has dropped from 24% in 1985 to 5.6% in 2002*

Despite an effort to overhaul how rape investigations are carried out, a report by the Home Office revealed that the proportion of cases of rape resulting in a conviction has dropped from 24% in 1985 to 5.6% in 2002 (Kelly et al, 2005), and by 2003 it was down to 5.3% (The Times, 2006; unpublished Home Office figures). Although there are estimated to be 500,000 domestic violence related calls to the police annually, only around 7,000 incidents (1.4%) result in a prosecution (Home Office, 2005a).

Violence against women impacts on women's earning capacity, their career, their access to services, their role in public life and their mental and physical health. It also impacts on their families and communities. The cost of domestic violence is estimated to be £22.9 billion per year (Walby, 2004) and a recent Home Office study estimates the physical and emotional costs of rape, 'the most serious violent crime after homicide', to be £61,440 per incident (Home Office, 2005b).

While victims of domestic violence have more resources available to them than ever before, the social stigma involved with addressing physical and sexual abuse still remains. For black and minority ethnic women these issues as well as fear of police racism and in some cases fear of losing immigration status, further intensify the problem. An estimated 500 women every year experience violence from a partner and cannot access Housing Benefit and other support, including places in refuges, because they are subject to immigration control. (Southall Black Sisters, 2004).

A recent independent audit of all government departments' work on violence against women found the lack of an integrated approach, very little monitoring or evaluation of policies or funding, and very little preventative work around violence against women (End Violence Against Women Coalition, 2005). The audit also highlighted a lack of understanding of what 'violence against women' means – most government departments only addressed domestic violence (i.e. not rape, female genital mutilation, forced marriage etc), if anything.

### **Immigration and asylum**

Although women's claims make up one third of all applications for asylum in Europe, gender issues have yet to be fully addressed when dealing with female asylum seekers and refugees. Despite government gender guidelines on asylum, procedural barriers and the 'gender blind' approach still hinder a woman's access to the appropriate and necessary legal process. (Joshi, 2004)

### **Mental health**

At least half of all women in touch with mental health services have experienced violence and abuse, yet the level of awareness amongst mental health professionals appears low and women are rarely asked about their experience of violence or sexual abuse (Department of Health, 2002). Whilst mental illness affects both men and women, there are clear gender differences in the occurrence of specific mental illnesses. Anxiety, depression and eating disorders, for example, are much more common among women than men. The Department of Health strategy for women's mental health, 'Into the Mainstream', identified that gender differences between women and men need to be equally recognised and addressed across research, planning, commissioning, the organising of services and delivery. The position of women in society, the different experiences women endure and the prevalence of violence against women, all mean that gender sensitive mental health care is essential to their recuperation. This includes training for mental health professionals on violence against women and single sex provision (Department of Health, 2002). Four years later, little has been done to implement the recommendations of the report.

### **Prison system**

The number of women in prison has been steadily rising in England and Wales, from 1,580 in 1993 to 4,572 in 2003 (Rickford, 2003). The most common crimes for which women are sent to prison are minor offences such as theft and handling stolen goods. The impact of prison is disproportionately harsh on many women prisoners and their children because they are much more likely to be solely responsible for the care of children and the maintenance of a home. More than 60% of women prisoners are mothers and 45% had children living with them at the time of imprisonment (Wolfe, 2000). Seventeen thousand children are separated from their mothers by imprisonment each year (Rickford, 2003). Imprisonment often results in the loss of a home and serious disruption to the lives of their children. In the most recent Home Office resettlement

*Imprisonment often results in the loss of a home and serious disruption to the lives of their children*

survey, 38% of women prisoners questioned said they were expecting to be homeless on release, and 31% who were in owned or rented property before custody, lost it while they were in prison. (Prison Reform Trust, 2000).

27 women killed themselves in prison in 2003-2004

Women prisoners are also much more likely than male prisoners to have mental health problems. Seventy per cent of women prisoners experience mental health problems and half have been victims of sexual abuse. Negligence of these contributing factors is apparent in high levels of suicide in prison: 37% of women prisoners have attempted suicide, and 27 women killed themselves in prison in 2003-2004 alone (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).

### Summary

In the last 30 years since the Sex Discrimination Act and the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission, there have been great improvements in women's lives, with sea changes like the criminalisation of rape in marriage in 1991. However, women's inequality is still deeply entrenched within British society, as shown by the high levels of discrimination in employment and of violence against women and the disproportionate impact of poverty on women. Many of the social institutions in the UK, such as the mental health, prison and immigration systems, are designed around the needs of men, resulting in the differential outcomes for men and women indicated by the figures above. This report looks at the contribution women's organisations are making in addressing these ingrained problems. The impact of these statistics on the lives of women and their families is illustrated in the following pages with data from the interviews in this study.

## 3.2 Problems described by women's organisations

In this study, we wanted to explore the ways in which discrimination, inequality and violence affect women. Interviewees were asked to describe the social problems their organisations worked to address and asked if (and how) these issues affected women differently from men.

### Violence against women

Although not specifically asked about it, 36 (82%) interviewees mentioned violence against women in connection with their work. Domestic violence was most often mentioned, but also rape, childhood sexual abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM), harassment, homophobia (physical abuse), forced marriage and honour killings.

"The majority of the work we do stems from and surrounds childhood sexual abuse. We deal with date rape, drug rape and rape per se but so many of the adults we work with are adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse [...] or they have experienced or witnessed sexual and domestic violence. We have a family support worker who works with the youngest children and parents, supporting mothers usually." (Colchester Rape Crisis Line)

Certain groups, such as disabled women and women with insecure immigration status, were described as being more vulnerable to violence *because* of their disability or immigration status. For example, one interviewee described how disabled women who are abused by 'carers' (whether paid or family members) find it very difficult to report the abuse.

Interviewees described the effects of violence on women and their families:

*"It means for a lot of women that they've contravened all expectations of them as a good person, as a good woman, as a good mother"*

"For women it [domestic violence] means that their self-esteem is extremely low, their confidence, their ability to make choices, they fear their own safety, fear their children's safety. For some women it means that their immigration status becomes more insecure, for some women it means they have no recourse to public funds if they leave and so they're financially extremely insecure. For most women it means leaving behind all their belongings, their possessions, friends, family. [...] It means for a lot of women that they've contravened all expectations of them as a good person, as a good woman, as a good mother. So most women when they come to us are extraordinarily vulnerable - 90% of women who use our services suffer from depression." (Camden Women's Aid)

"First of all there is no safety in their homes [...] they don't feel safe, they face threats, they get beaten and insulted - that brings their self-esteem down and that doesn't allow them to participate in social life or the wider community in terms of employment, getting jobs. Violence that happens in the house affects children and the whole environment within the house - there is no healthy environment they live in if their dignity is brought down. It affects their self-esteem and in many cases it develops into mental illness, so women face mental health problems. In some cases women think of killing themselves [...] it's not a normal situation that women should live in." (Middle East Centre for Women's Rights)

Although men do also experience violence, several interviewees stressed the gendered nature of violence, either by referring to research showing the greater prevalence and severity of violence for women (see section 3.1), or by discussing violence in the context of male power: "men want to assert their power and control [...] the man is supposed to be the boss" (Elevate).

A common theme in several of the interviews was the lack of control many women have over their lives. This was often discussed in connection with the power imbalance between women and men, or men having power over women's lives. Several interviewees described how women's everyday lives were controlled by their husbands (or in some cases fathers or brothers), such as being restricted from going out alone, or are instructed not to open the door, or need male family members' permission to take up education or training. For example:

"We are speaking about basic human rights which are violated by male members, or the culture we have, that when men are controlling women's behaviour, women are not allowed, for example, to exercise their personal rights, personal freedom [...] to choose their education or employment or going out or making friends." (Middle East Centre for Women's Rights)

### **Dependency making women vulnerable**

In connection with these issues, over a quarter of interviewees also referred to the issues of dependency (or lack of independence), particularly economic dependency, which makes women vulnerable to violence.

"Well, the thing they [service users] have in common is that they want to move on [...] They want to make the best of what they've got - get a better house and get a better job, they want economic independence from partners who they've experienced violence from. Increasingly, if they develop economic independence, the power dynamics of the

relationship change so they don't have to leave - which is their decision not mine."  
(Haringey Women's Forum)

This dependency could take many forms, including:

- Women's immigration status being dependent on that of their husband (either for asylum or if they were married to an EU citizen);
- Disabled women's dependency on family members for personal care needs, (described by one organisation - Gemma - as particularly problematic for lesbians when the family is homophobic);
- Employers holding, and withholding, the passports of migrant domestic workers.

### **'No recourse to public funds' rule**

Sixteen per cent (n=7) of organisations spoke about the problems faced by women with no recourse to public funds. This problem has occurred since the early 1980s when the 'one year rule' (which later became the two year rule) was brought in, making migrant spouses of EU citizens ineligible for public funds such as Housing Benefit. For women experiencing violence and abuse, it means they often cannot access refuge spaces and other support because they do not have access to benefits. Despite the 'domestic violence concession', passed in 1999, many women are still trapped in violent situations because of their immigration status. (Southall Black Sisters, 2004)

"As soon as a [migrant domestic] worker tries to challenge their employment conditions or leave their employment, they are homeless, and on their visa is a stamp 'no recourse to public funds'. A woman having to run away from a very abusive situation is now open to other types of abuse." (Kalayaan)

"Many women will come to the community project with the belief, because this is what their abusive partner has been telling them, that if they try to get help because of the violent situation that they're in, then social services will take their children away from them if they know there's a problem in the family - they won't be entitled to benefits and basically they're going to be in no man's land." (Tower Hamlets Women's Aid)

### **Extreme poverty**

The majority of women's organisations work with women living in poverty, and sometimes extreme poverty, whether that is a direct result of violence against women or linked to other issues. There were striking examples in the interviews of the extreme poverty faced by some of the services users of women's organisations:

*"Sometimes they cannot even get to a GP's appointment because they cannot afford the bus fare"*

"They have to care for the whole family including their men as well. And also these are people who are experiencing severe poverty. They can't make ends meet. Sometimes they cannot even get to a GP's appointment because they cannot afford the bus fare. And a lot of them, because they are asylum seekers, they feel trapped in their lives because without a status your rights are very limited." (Zimbabwe Women's Network)

"A lot of the distress that we find in women is because they can't get jobs, or if they get a job it's low income and they're trying to rob Peter to pay Paul. There are loads of issues of where they live, poverty, bad housing. All those issues are male-designed, that don't empower people. Maybe local males suffer in the same way, but they are not left to also provide the childcare, the cooking and shopping and planning the food and all the rest of it." (Black Women's Mental Health Project)

These issues are often not restricted to services users, but also affect staff and volunteers of women's organisations. One interviewee from a second-tier (umbrella) organisation describes some of the issues affecting her clients, who are women working in small women's black and minority ethnic community groups:

"They are working mums and often have to rush to collect their children - time is a big issue for them. They are underpaid, work long hours, and it is hard to remain motivated at times." (Anonymous)

### **Mental health problems**

Many interviewees spoke about the mental health problems faced by women, often in connection with domestic or sexual violence. A rape crisis centre described how a rape survivor, despite having been in the mental health system for 36 years, had never been asked about the root causes of her problems:

"One of our service users first came to SERICC when she was 58 years old. She had been in the mental health system since she was 22. She'd been given ECT [Electroconvulsive therapy] medication and her four children were taken into care. She was in and out of the mental health hospital for 20 years. Finally she gained the courage and told her psychiatrist that she felt her mental health problems were related to childhood sexual abuse. In all this time, no one had ever asked her why she had been experiencing such distress." (South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre)

Many of the interviewees that worked on domestic violence described the impact this abuse has on women's mental health. For example:

"I think if a woman becomes a victim of domestic violence it may be that it's not the first time, it may be that she experienced something similar as a child. Women experience a real kind of emotional paralysis really, and they find themselves unable to move forward or to function efficiently. I think it absolutely shatters their self esteem and their self confidence. I think that's it in a nutshell really, and that manifests itself in different ways - depression, despair, that kind of thing." (Barking and Dagenham Women's Aid/Eaves Housing for Women)

Isolation was a theme that ran through several of the interviews with different kinds of organisations and is a likely contributor to mental health problems. It was mentioned in several different contexts, as experienced by groups of women as diverse as disabled lesbians, Somali refugees and young mothers.

*"There will be considerable denial about a disabled woman actually being lesbian, 'oh, you saw it on the telly', that kind of thing"*

"That's the kind of isolation. [She] might be absolutely surrounded by people, but they're not lesbian people, and they're not people with her own outlook on life. There will be considerable denial about a disabled woman actually being lesbian, 'oh, you saw it on the telly', that kind of thing. 'You think you are but you're not really.' 'A child of mine couldn't possibly be lesbian' - that sort of attitude." (Gemma)

Another reoccurring theme that occurred time and time again in the interviews was confidence and self-esteem (or lack of it). It was mentioned by 24 interviewees (55%), often in the context of violence against women or the need for women-only spaces. This lack of confidence was attributed to the different value of the roles of men and women in society:

"Women have their own sets of disadvantage. Society can be quite macho, a lot of success is measured in masculine terms, through male role models and male achievement. It's hard for women who don't measure up to find their way back in. Women very often bear much of the social consequences of difficulties, women can be disadvantaged by their family and child caring responsibilities and other social difficulties are compounded by their child caring role. Very often women who have no other problems at all may find that after years of not working they've lost confidence."  
(Hillcroft College)

Dependency on alcohol was highlighted as a problem for women by one interviewee, who discussed how it affects women differently from men:

"The stigma and shame associated with women being a problem drinker is much higher with women in this society than with men. Women's drinking tends to be far more hidden than men's. [...] But if she is a mother, then that stigma is at least doubled and she feels even more ashamed - that can be an awful vicious circle where she stays at home and is drinking and doesn't dare seek help because she is scared that her children might be taken away from her." (Women's Alcohol Centre/Alcohol Recovery Project)

### **Multiple oppression**

Several interviewees spoke about the particular issues that affect women in minority groups – for example where women may face both gender and race discrimination:

*"We are confronted with multiple disadvantages as a result of our gender as women, but also as a result of our race"*

"Because women are disadvantaged in many ways, even within their communities, and particularly so for BME women and African women. We are confronted with multiple disadvantages as a result of our gender as women, but also as a result of our race. And we face the same challenges within our own communities, in that we are perceived as second-class citizens." (Zimbabwe Women's Network)

One interviewee also discussed the reasons why discrimination against women can sometimes be more severe within minority groups (in this case people with learning disabilities) than in mainstream society. She describes how social structures or power dynamics, in this case sexism, are 'magnified' in oppressed groups because people who are discriminated against will sometimes discriminate against, or seek to exercise power and control over, others perceived to be weaker than them:

"The structures within society that are there for the generic population are magnified for women with learning disabilities, because the disempowered disempower others. So where there are lots of Speaking Up organisations [user-led organisations for people with learning disabilities], the people that tend to take on roles within those organisations have tended to be men." (Powerhouse)

The two interviewees from lesbian and bisexual women's projects discussed women's experiences of homophobia, which was described as taking many different forms, from denial by a family of a disabled lesbian's sexuality, to direct verbal or physical abuse:

"One of the women [...] was on her way to work at seven in the morning and this young straight couple said 'that's a lesbian'. She said it wasn't threatening so she half laughed. There was no physical threat and yet she was very shaken. Just the idea that you can do that to someone in the street and it's considered alright, but also that we're this kind of alien species still in the minds of lots of people. [Women experience] homophobia like

that, which I would describe as intrusive but mild, through to physical abuse, harassment at work. (Women's Voice/Kairos in Soho)

Racism was explicitly mentioned by several interviewees, and is likely to affect many other workers and service users of women's organisations. One interviewee described the racism experienced by one of their service users:

"She's said on more than one occasion that she doesn't know what she would have done without the service because she's suffering so badly with the harassment." (Somali Women's Health Project)

### **Employment discrimination**

Direct and indirect gender discrimination in employment were highlighted as problems facing women. When asked about women's equality generally, many interviewees mentioned the pay gap that still persists between women and men, and the lack of economic independence as an exacerbating factor in violence against women. Examples were also given of direct and indirect discrimination in the job market. For example:

"One of the big issues we have is that women can't gain access to work placements. [...] You can get women ringing round 20-30 employers and not being able to get access to work placements [...] they'll say things like 'are you ringing for your husband?' or 'no, we want somebody who's qualified', or 'no, this is a construction job I think you've got the wrong number' - it's direct discrimination." (Anonymous)

One interview also gave an alarming example of the pregnancy discrimination highlighted by the Equal Opportunities Commission (2005), in this case affecting an extremely vulnerable section of the workforce:

*"if they get pregnant, they will almost definitely be sacked."*

"Another issue that affects women in particular is that migrant workers here don't have any reproductive rights, they're living in an employer's house as part of that family, and there's very little opportunity for them to have a life of their own, and [...] if they get pregnant, they will almost definitely be sacked." (Kalayaan)

### **Institutional sexism – gender neutral policy fails women**

Many organisations, particularly black and minority ethnic organisations, described the lack of available services to meet their users' needs, or the problems women had in accessing services available to them. In addition, many of the interviewees gave examples of systematic discrimination against women in society, i.e. how certain social systems or structures were set up to address the needs of men rather than women. In most cases this is because the social systems and structures have developed in a gender neutral way, i.e. without taking into consideration the different characteristics or needs of men and women. Interviewees gave several examples of this occurring, from homelessness services and the prison system, to building design and scientific testing.

#### *Homelessness services:*

"From working with women I became aware of the struggle to run the service within what are predominantly male-orientated services. If you look at how services are set up, for example homelessness. The majority of rough sleepers are men, so the statistics, most

of how the funding is set up is based on patterns that are male. So we look for rough sleepers in doorways. But not many women sleep in doorways because it's too scary. Women are more likely to walk around all night so they are less likely to get a CAT [Contact and Assessment Team] number. And if they can't get a CAT number, they can't get a bed." (women@thewell)

***Asylum system:***

"The Refugee Convention was written in 1951, very much with the idea of a male political refugee in mind, and it doesn't cover the range of experiences that women have and the type of persecution that they flee. [...] The women are involved in lower level political activities, but they can still be in danger because of things like handing out leaflets or hiding people. Also, because women suffer gender persecution - so things like sexual violence - it's harder for them. [...] So where men generally suffer persecution caused by the state, women may also suffer from someone in the private sphere and the state may be unable to protect them. Also there's the country information - the Home Office uses country information to decide whether an asylum seeker would be safe or not if they were sent home. In general, that sort of information tends to be about what happens to men (men's human rights abuses) and it doesn't cover the sort of information that I just talked about. So we collect country information that deals with human rights abuses that affect women in different countries and make it available." (Refugee Women's Resource Project/Asylum Aid)

***Prison system:***

"We think women prisoners are a different constituency to men in prison in several ways. One is their offending background - the proportion of women in prison for violent offences is very small and the majority of women prisoners are there for offences that don't threaten people's safety or security. [...] There's also the position of women as primary carers of children or other relatives. [...] So prison has a disproportionately harsh impact on women because of those responsibilities. [...] They are much less likely to remain in their family home. We know only about five per cent of the children of women prisoners will stay in their family home and for the children of male prisoners most of them will stay with the other parent. There are 70,000 men in prison and about 4,500 women, so when policy is being made it's sort of the default setting for policy being made with male prisoners in mind - not taking into account the needs of female prisoners." (Women in Prison)

***Health risks:***

*"traditional approaches haven't taken account of the differential effects on women"*

"Our bodies tend to be smaller than men's and traditional approaches to risk assessment of chemicals have been based on adult male worker exposure. So, traditional approaches haven't taken account of the differential effects on women, or indeed, on children." (Women's Environmental Network)

***Transport and the built environment:***

"There's the whole social thing about women's position in society, the fact that they do generally have the majority of caring responsibilities. They tend to be the part-time people in employment, they have far more complex journeys to make and the way our transport systems are designed are all on the model of the 'nine-to-five'. [...] Transport is not designed for the school, the part-time work, then back to the nursery. It's not

designed for that either in its routes or in its timetabling. [...] When you're designing, you're designing for yourself really - that's what you have in your mind. So basically, this country has been designed by white, middle-class, able-bodied men and you can see that in the size of things, in the fact that most chairs I sit on, my feet don't touch the ground. [...] Where things are positioned, the weight of things - everything is being designed with the thinking that this will suit a bloke." (Women's Design Service)

*Criminal justice system:*

One interviewee spoke about the shock that is often felt when people realise how badly women are treated by the criminal justice system in rape cases:

"Another woman was raped by three men and they were found not guilty. The family were outraged because, again, there was that assumption that the system works. Everyone thinks that a rape case would be supportive of the victim, but that didn't happen. The family and the woman were absolutely horrified at what did and didn't happen in court. SERICC enabled them to talk directly to the CPS [Crown Prosecution Service] which helped them understand how the legal system works." (South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre)

*the need for representation and 'voice' was most strongly expressed by interviewees working in minority groups*

**Exclusion from high-level decision-making**

Another common theme that arose in the interviews was the issue of women's involvement in decision making and positions of power. Women are under-represented in positions of power in politics, the judiciary and business - only 20% of MPs, 26% of the Cabinet, and 18% of the House of Lords are female, along with only 9% of high court judges and 3.7% of executive directors of top FTSE 100 companies (WRC, 2004)

In this study the need for representation and 'voice' was most strongly expressed by interviewees working in minority groups. When asked why her organisation chose to focus on black women, one interviewee responded that it was "because we ourselves are black women, we are speaking from personal experience, and we felt that our needs were not addressed in the other groups [...] and we didn't have a voice" (Black Women's Mental Health Project). This was echoed by the disabled women's organisations, for example:

"Women are more than 50% of the population and disabled women need to have that representation. When we've held conferences for disabled women, lots of the issues that come up there is that they feel they haven't got a voice or that the power lies with disabled men rather than with the women." (Women's Committee/British Council of Disabled People's Organisations)

However, in every field women are less involved in high-level decisions, including within much of the voluntary and community sector:

"One of the continuous situations within the environmental movement as a whole is that the grassroots, the membership, if it's not majority women, it's certainly 50-50. We are there in big numbers and are hugely concerned about the environment. But when you look at the leadership, it tends to be dominated by men." (Women's Environmental Network)

### **Summary**

The interviews in this study indicated that the different kinds of disadvantage and discrimination facing women are closely inter-related. For example, the pay gap and poverty are closely linked to violence against women. Violence affects women's ability to gain economic independence because of mental health problems and men's control over their lives. In turn their economic dependency on their husbands (or employer in the case of domestic workers) traps them in violent situations because they are reliant on the abuser for accommodation, food etc. The multiple issues faced by women calls for an integrated approach to tackling discrimination against women within society.

# 4 Solutions – what women's organisations do

This chapter gives an overview of the main activities of the organisations interviewed and begins to explore how women's organisations offer solutions to the problems of women's inequality that were outlined in Chapter 3. Five organisations are profiled here to illustrate the range of work that women's organisations in this study do.

## 4.1 Main activities of the organisations

The 44 organisations interviewed in this study fell into four main categories, with a good deal of overlap between them:

### **Front-line services**

Seventy-seven per cent of organisations deliver direct services to individual women. These include safe accommodation, counselling, outreach, advocacy, advice (for example, benefits, immigration and legal), interpretation and training. The work of Positively Women provides an example of this type of service provision.

Eighteen per cent of organisations provide refuge space for individual women fleeing violence, primarily domestic violence. The profile of Tower Hamlets Women's Aid describes the activities delivered to and impact on women fleeing domestic violence.

*This integrated, one-stop-shop approach is a significant theme in the methods used by women's organisations*

Twenty per cent of organisations in this category operate as women's centres, offering a variety of services under one roof. This integrated, one-stop-shop approach is a significant theme in the methods used by women's organisations and is discussed further in section 6.5. The profile of Hillingdon Women's Centre provides insight into this type of service.

### **Small women's community groups (often 'self-help')**

Five organisations (11%), namely Gemma (the disabled lesbian friendship network), Mamas and Babies, Older Feminist Network and Women's Voice (a lesbian and bisexual women's group based at a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organisation) set their work around support, friendship and/or campaigning. These organisations create a space whereby issues can be voiced by the women themselves. The peer support element (important to many of the organisations interviewed), is discussed further in section 6.4 and is illustrated in the profile of Black Women's Mental Health Project.

### **Second-tier – service delivery to other organisations**

Three organisations (7%) were second tier (or umbrella) organisations, providing services to other women's organisations – South Yorkshire Women's Development Network, Greater London Domestic Violence Project and the Bengali Women's Group Forum at the Consortium of Bengali Organisations. Services include providing training, one-to-one development support, information and networking opportunities.

### Campaign groups

Finally, the Middle East Centre for Women's Rights, the Women's Committee of the British Council of Disabled People and Women's Environmental Network focused primarily on campaigning or representing the interests of specific groups of women. However, almost all organisations in the study included campaigning and advocacy as some element of their work. The impact of this activity on changing society is discussed further in section 5.3 and highlighted below in the case profile of the Women's Environmental Network.

## 4.2 Profiles of organisations in this study

### Positively Women

Positively Women was set up in 1987 to provide support and services to women with HIV and AIDS. The organisation has 21 staff and 35 volunteers and an annual income of around £700,000. It supports over 1,000 women living with HIV, a third of whom are asylum seeking or refugee women. Positively Women offer one-to-one support for women living with HIV, children and family support, a helpline service and are currently running projects addressing issues around HIV and immigration, as well as drugs and women in prison.

A distinctive feature of the organisation is its focus on peer-led, individual support. The decision to become peer-led was based on research conducted by the organisation which documented the success of user-led support. Positively Women offers a structured volunteer programme which encourages ex-service users to work within the organisation. As part of the programme, women initially make contact and are seen by one of the workers, they then move to the support group and may later become a volunteer or a paid member of staff. The interviewee from Positively Women gave an example of how the 'taking part programme' had enabled HIV positive women to engage in the policy-making process in a creative and highly effective way:

"Three of our staff attended breakfast with Tony Blair when there was the launch of the new global initiative on HIV to which DfID [Department for International Development] was making a rather large contribution and they attended the breakfast meeting - there were 20 people at that. That was part of our programme on skilling women up to participate at consultation at national and local level and I didn't think you could get any higher than in lobbying than that. People came here unable to acknowledge their HIV status and they moved on through our services into having breakfast with the PM and telling him to put more money into microbicides research and things like that."

*because service users who are newly diagnosed with HIV see staff "working, living and leading their lives well and probably handling a family whilst living with HIV", members of staff are able to act as role models within the organisation*

The peer-led aspect of the organisation has important impacts on service provision. Firstly, the fact that front-line service providers are women living with HIV themselves and ex-service users, means that the work of the organisation is informed and directed by women who are familiar with effective solutions. Secondly, because service users who are newly diagnosed with HIV see staff "working, living and leading their lives well and probably handling a family whilst living with HIV", members of staff are able to act as role models within the organisation. Thirdly, the participation of ex-service users in service provision leads to greater self-empowerment and has positive long-term consequences.

The process of empowerment of service users is inextricably linked to their role as volunteers within the organisation:

"In the long-term we're seeing women coming from out of the shadows into disclosing about their status, being public and actually affecting the delivery of services themselves. So, they're participating in consultations on services, they're much more public now than perhaps when they were first diagnosed. I think that has very serious and excellent long-term prospects."

### **Tower Hamlets Women's Aid**

Tower Hamlets Women's Aid was set up in 1975 and provides support, information and advice to women affected by domestic violence. The organisation's main activities are the provision of temporary safe accommodation (refuge space) for women fleeing domestic violence and a community-based advice, information and support project for women who continue to experience domestic violence in their homes. Tower Hamlets Women's Aid currently employs ten members of staff and 14 volunteers.

The women who access the organisation's services come from a wide area, encompassing all London boroughs, as well as regions nationwide and occasionally elsewhere in Europe. As a pioneer in setting up refuges in the UK, Tower Hamlets Women's Aid has expertise in identifying and addressing problems related to domestic violence suffered by women. The existence of a refuge service and a community outreach service within the organisation offer invaluable insight into the ways in which various branches of a service compliment each other.

"In the refuge most of our referrals come through the crisis helpline, we get referrals from a variety of sources but that's our major source of referral. So then we would just go through our criteria, if they think it's a suitable space and we think it's a suitable space for them, then they come. Once they're here, they're allocated a key worker whose responsibility then is to settle them into the project and to work with them, to attend to their longer-term housing needs and to offer them any support they need to a) settle in here and b) to start taking control again of their lives. That could be help with referring them to specialist services like counselling, psychiatric services, help placing the children into local schools or liaising with a local authority in trying to get them more permanent housing."

Whilst the refuge service ensures that victims of domestic violence are safe from perpetrators of violence in the short-term, the community project ensures that women have access to information about domestic violence abuse, thus helping them make informed decisions about their lives. The interviewee from the organisation provided a remarkable example of the way the community project impacted on a service user.

*"She was a total wreck when she came to us. She was totally desperate. Since that time, she has blossomed, she is like a different girl"*

"There was a young girl that approached the project. She was escaping violence from her father - her father had completely dominated the lives of the whole family, he had sexually abused her from being a young child. She was a total wreck when she came to us, didn't know how to get out of this situation, didn't know what to do, had no self-esteem whatsoever and was just completely rudderless. She was totally desperate. That is now not the case. The fact that she was able to receive long-term emotional support from her case-worker, that the case-worker was able to secure accommodation for her. Since that time, she has blossomed, she is like a different girl - I call her girl because she's very young, she's a teenager, she's not an adult woman. She has now got her self-

esteem back, she no longer has an eating disorder and is able to cope and get on with her life."

When discussing the value of refuges, the interviewee went on to highlight the importance of services provided by the women's sector, which is often overlooked:

"The women's sector is absolutely vital and important because without it, there are so many women out there who will not be able to access services for their needs – it's vital that the sector remains. And not only that it remains, but that it actually gets recognition and proper funding to continue services, so we don't have a position where a vital organisation like Rape Crisis Centre has to close because of lack of funding."

### **Hillingdon Women's Centre**

Hillingdon Women's Centre was set up in 1986 and offers a wide range of services to approximately 5,000 women in London every year. The centre operates a drop-in service throughout the week, for women seeking information, domestic violence and rape crisis help, one-to-one counselling, legal advice sessions and enrolment in free courses. It runs support groups for young mums and for women survivors of sexual abuse and currently have three paid staff and 35 volunteers.

The remarkable feature of Hillingdon Women's Centre can be found in the range of services the centre offers – its 'one-stop-shop' approach. Its integrated approach broadens the scope of service provision to women, ensuring that service users are offered support in a variety of different ways:

*"they will contact the centre and thank us and tell us that in actual fact, we saved their lives"*

"Numerous women that had fled domestic violence situations and we get to hear from them maybe a year or so later. Once their lives are settled, they will contact the centre and thank us and tell us that in actual fact, we saved their lives. That's one of the main things they say, that their lives are so much better now, that they and their children are safe, happier, living more fruitful lives. Even if their financial situation has been reduced, they are generally happier and more independent both mentally and physically."

Hillingdon clearly caters for needs that women in the community have identified themselves and this needs-based approach has meant that the centre has been a women-only space since its inception:

"Women come to us because it's a women-only safe space. They come to us because they've been abused in some way and maybe at this moment in time they don't wish to engage with a man."

The centre does not employ male staff or volunteers, nor are men allowed into the building during drop-in hours. However, on Fridays, there is an induction of male staff in the borough on the work of the Centre and the reasons why it is a women-only space. The centre offers invaluable insight into the inner workings and crucial importance needs-based, women-only spaces. Hillingdon is, in fact, part of a long tradition of women-only centres which came into being in the 1970s and 1980s:

"Back in the '70s and '80s there was the [GLC] Women's Committee and a major push for women-only spaces in every part of the country, in every borough, in every county – that is how a lot of women-only centres came into being at that time. They were supported, valued and understood as to why we existed."

The interviewee from Hillingdon stressed that the range of services provided by the centre put considerable strain on financial resources and that "the challenges that the women's sector faces are extremely exhausting for the workers in it". Hillingdon faces difficulties in resourcing its work and recently had to stop running two very popular support groups due to lack of funding:

"Some of our projects that we've got money from pay part of the running costs of the centre. But if those funds go this year because the Primary Care Trusts are low on money, then we'll lose the money for running costs from those projects also."

### **Black Women's Mental Health Project**

The Black Women's Mental Health Project was set up in 1996 and is a self-help group run by one part-time paid worker, five to six volunteers and social work students on placement. The project provides home visits, hospital visits, emotional support, referrals to counselling and a helpline answer phone service, where calls are returned within 24 hours. The staff and volunteers regularly visit all the women patients in the local mental health trust hospital. The group also participates in national debates and consultations on mental health issues. The organisation's annual income is £40,000, which covers rent, staff costs and all the costs of their activities.

The project makes a big difference to women's lives on very limited resources:

*"We have seen women go on to do short courses, one woman went on to do a course at the local college"*

"Most of the people that have joined us have gone on to do other things, they haven't just relapsed back into the system. [...] We have seen women go on to do short courses, one woman went on to do a course at the local college. Another is learning English and she became a volunteer with us, and she has also started a family, so she has got a young baby here but she still managed to become a volunteer and to learn English and join the local mother and baby group."

For the interviewee, the key to its success is that the project is a self-help group:

"Nearly all of us here have some experience of mental or emotional distress. [...] So we are breaking down the stigma of mental health, to show people first, as soon as they enter the door, that women have recovered, women who have had mental or emotional illness are able to offer their own service. We think this is important to us because it aids recovery, it shows that it is possible. And you also know that you are going to be talking to somebody who may know where you are coming from. This has been quite an impact and I think this is what has helped us the last ten years. We may not have the resources, but this issue of us being a self-help group and women coming through the doors and hearing of us through word of mouth, and coming back to support us in any way they can."

Despite the invaluable work done by Black Women's Mental Health Project, it is held back by its limited funding, and caught in a catch 22 situation, because the one paid staff member and the volunteers do not have time to spend on fundraising. They would like to offer a drop-in service, hot meals and respite care, but cannot because they are "stuck in one room in a business centre."

"We really need maybe two or three people to do the funding for us, you know, get us off the ground and maybe a fundraiser in place as part of the package, to keep the funding ongoing and look after it."

### **Women's Environmental Network**

The Women's Environmental Network (WEN) is a campaigning organisation which seeks to address issues that link the environment and women's health. The organisation enables individuals to use their consumer power as a force for positive environmental change, by informing, educating and empowering women and men. WEN is currently running a local food campaign, a Real Nappy project, and activities addressing stress incontinence, sanitary protection and waste prevention. It is run by 15 staff and 40-50 volunteers and has an annual income of around £450,000. At the heart of WEN's work is a gendered understanding of environmental issues, which inspired the establishment of the organisation in 1988:

"[WEN] couldn't exist if it wasn't led by women. The whole reason that it started in the first place was because women who were working in the environmental field, and working in other environmental organisations, got really frustrated that women's particular issues, and women's perspectives, just weren't being addressed. So, for instance, thinking about paper products, thinking about the impact that we as women have on the environment and the effect that the environment has on us – all of this wasn't seen as important enough. [...] So WEN's founders made a conscious decision to set up a women specific organisation, because in the mainstream those issues would not be addressed."

*WEN won a campaign to give local authorities the power to introduce waste reducing measures and to promote waste preventing ideas*

Throughout its history, WEN has pioneered successful national campaigns in the areas of waste prevention, sanitary protection and awareness of pesticides in food, whilst influencing government policy at the highest level. The organisation's remarkable influence is most evident in its preventative work around waste. With the passing of the Waste Minimisation Act in 1988, WEN won a campaign to give local authorities the power to introduce waste reducing measures and to promote waste preventing ideas. For the past 10 years, WEN has been raising awareness of the environmental impact of disposable nappies and has successfully helped change the priorities of governmental waste prevention policies, as well as social attitudes towards waste prevention:

"We have definitely influenced local authorities and local health care providers on the issue of nappies, in terms of local authorities recognising that it is a waste prevention issue. This can significantly affect household behaviour, reducing the amount of waste that's going to landfill, and meeting their targets. We have increased parents' awareness of, and access to, real nappies. A 'real nappy' industry has grown up in the time that we've been running our campaign, which didn't exist before. There were very small companies and very few of them, but they've now grown. There is now an alliance of real nappy companies and it's now in the Government Waste Strategy to promote the use of real nappies."

As part of their work on nappies, WEN took on the company Proctor and Gamble, who wrote a report concluding that there was little difference in the overall environmental impact between disposable and reusable nappies. WEN commissioned a critique of this report and complained to the Advertising Standard Authority about the inaccurate claims the company had made about disposable nappies. Thanks to the efforts of WEN, Proctor and Gamble was forced to stop using environmental claims to advertise its nappies in the UK.

### **Summary**

The women's organisations in this study provided a wide and varied range of activities from front-line services to capacity building of other voluntary and community organisations to policy and campaigning. Four categories of organisations were identified: front-line, small community groups, second tiers and campaigning organisations. The majority of organisations overlapped categories. Five organisations were profiled to illustrate the types of services and activities delivered in these categories to illustrate user-led, integrated, self-help and campaigning approaches women's organisations take in their work.

# 5 Solutions – the impact of women's organisations

Chapter 5 explores the impact of women's organisations, on individual women, on children, families and communities, and on wider society. In this report, 'impact' is defined as the overall changes and effects that take place in the lives of women and their environment, as a direct result of the work of an organisation. The methods women's organisations use to achieve these changes are discussed in Chapter 6.

## 5.1 Changing lives – the impact on women

Interviewees were asked to discuss the immediate and long-term impact of their organisations on their service users, and their responses covered the following areas:

- Protection from violence, including saving lives
- Access to education and training
- Access to employment and economic independence
- Improved physical and mental health
- Integration of refugee women into society

### **Protection from violence**

As discussed in the previous chapter, violence against women is a serious and widespread problem in the UK which bears great costs to individuals, employers and the state. Eighty-two per cent of organisations interviewed addressed the issue of violence against women in some way. The interviews indicate that women's organisations play a significant role in reducing incidences of physical, sexual and mental abuse in women's lives, and in reducing the damage caused by violence by providing specialist counselling and support to women.

### *Prevention of loss of life:*

Women's organisations' provision of safe emergency refuge is irreplaceable for women who face potentially life-threatening situations in their everyday lives. Other women's organisations play an important role, for example by providing support and directing women to refuges. The interviewee from the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation said the organisation had "saved more than 30 lives" since it was set up in 2002.

*"We are saving lives - that's the most important thing for us"*

"We are saving lives - that's the most important thing for us. If women are seeking help from you and saying 'my family will kill me', first of all you have to save her before doing other services." (Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation)

Hillingdon Women's Centre also commented that "once [former service users'] lives are settled, they will contact the centre and thank us and tell us that in actual fact, we saved their lives."

*the woman and her daughters are safe and the girls have been living in one place for three years and attending school – "that's the longest they've ever been in one place and free from abuse"*

#### **Long-term freedom from violence:**

Violence is a damaging factor in many women's lives, denying them the ability to make choices that are important to them and their children. The notion of gaining control over their lives was described as being related to longer term improvements in service users' lives. Apart from the impact it has on women, it breaks the cycle of violence that has damaging effects on children. Tower Hamlets Women's Aid describes the long-term impact of their work as enabling women to "actually move on with their lives, not go back to the situation that they fled from or [not] go on into another abusive relationship." (Tower Hamlets Women's Aid). Colchester Rape Crisis Line (CRCL) gave an example of a woman who had experienced repeated abuse and whose her daughters were also targeted for abuse. Despite trying to escape the situation and changing her name, the woman and her children were tracked down twice. After support provided by CRCL, the woman and her daughters are safe and the girls have been living in one place for three years and attending school – "that's the longest they've ever been in one place and free from abuse".

#### **Access to education and training**

Access to education and training plays an invaluable role in enabling marginalised groups of women to attain qualifications that are necessary for economic independence and empowerment. Half of the organisations interviewed in this study enabled women to access training or education, either by providing it directly or by supporting women to access external opportunities, such as going to university. Hillcroft College, a women-only college specifically working to empower women through learning, offers an interesting insight into the importance of education and training in service users' lives:

"We say we change women's lives. The majority of women will progress either into work or further to higher education. In some cases if you take women who have had problems in schooling, they start to believe in themselves, they think they're stupid then they discover there were other things holding them back and not intrinsic stupidity. So yes, we empower women and build their confidence and ability to achieve." (Hillcroft College)

In some cases, it is evident that through access to women's organisations, service users were able to continue education and training they had previously started. Women's organisations provide a support network that encourages women to continue achieving despite seemingly impossible circumstances.

"I was a medical student at the time I had my daughter. Just being able to carry on and belonging to the organisation, hanging out with the women and all that encouraged me and gave me the right frame of mind to carry on and juggle my academic work with having my baby as well. So I didn't have to drop either because I got the support and information from the group." (Mamas and Babies)

Organisations interviewed in this study provide access to training for some of the most vulnerable people in society, such as newly arrived refugees, trafficked women, women with few English language skills, prisoners, and survivors of childhood sexual abuse or domestic violence. In many cases, participation in education and training enables service users to address long-term mental, physical and financial difficulties they have faced. For example the Creative and Supportive Trust provides education opportunities to women in prison, which enables women to address any drug or alcohol issues and results in reduced re-offending rates. Another example was given by a refuge whose support had enabled one women to qualify as a lawyer:

"One of the women is actually a qualified lawyer now. She was studying, then was forced into a marriage and had kids and everything. Now she's gone back to studying and now she is a qualified lawyer." (Kiran Asian Women's Aid)

### **Access to employment and economic independence**

As we saw in the previous chapter, the pay gap and gendered poverty are persistent and complex problems in the UK. Achieving employment and economic independence can often be a difficult and slow process due to many factors, including the lack of affordable childcare, and safety and mental health problems associated with violence and abuse. Twenty-seven per cent of the interviewees in this study gave examples of their work contributing directly to women securing employment. These included several examples of women setting up social enterprises or businesses, such as in landscape gardening, construction and food manufacture.

"I had a letter yesterday from a client who came to see us last year to say thank you. She said she had been sober now for nine months and she become a trustee on a local parents organisation. She's now got a full-time job and just wanted to thank us because she remembers what was said in the groups and that the information was so useful." (Women's Alcohol Centre/Alcohol Recovery Project)

The interviews indicated that volunteering was often a gateway to employment. Indeed, several of the interviewees in this study who were paid managers had themselves started as volunteers in the organisations. Below is a typical example of the impact of women's organisations in empowering women to overcome great difficulties and develop their careers.

*"she's made the circle from desperation living on benefits, to a fulfilling career for herself"*

"One woman who got involved right at the very beginning had just got out of a ten year marriage which was very violent. She'd been hospitalised a number of times by her violent ex-partner and through the support that she received from the centre, she was able to put in context her experience of violence and abuse, to name it as domestic violence and recognise it wasn't her fault. She became a volunteer and she undertook a lot of training courses. She applied and was successful in achieving a paid post within the centre as volunteer support officer - she's made the circle from desperation living on benefits, to a fulfilling career for herself." (Winner Project/Preston Road Women's Centre)

### **Improved physical and mental health**

The women's organisations interviewed in this study delivered a wide range of benefits to mental and physical health. Most did not work specifically on health or mental health but it was a significant impact of their work in other areas. The Somali Women's Health Project works with many victims of female genital mutilation (FGM). The project improves access to health services, which leads to significant improvements to women's health and wellbeing:

"I have a quote from a woman who used our advocacy service. She says: 'it was very difficult for me to access the service of FGM reverse operation because I didn't know it existed in the UK. And if the Somali project worker at the centre had not helped me, I would have been sick and unhappy. I feel that she saved my life because I was in physical and emotional pain and I feel she understood me and explained everything to me in my mother tongue and this has made a big difference in my life today and I'm a healthy and happy woman!'"

As well as working with women with serious mental health problems, (for example the Black Women's Mental Health Project, described in Chapter 4, works with women in institutions), many women's organisations improve women's general mental well-being. For example:

"In general, what we find is that women go from being timid, tearful and undermined and come back confident and emotionally strong. I can say without any hesitation that many, many women who have been through Women's Aid system get to that space." (Barking and Dagenham's Women's Aid/Eaves Housing for Women)

One of the important roles of the organisations interviewed in this study was early intervention to prevent serious mental health problems arising, although it is notoriously difficult to measure this kind of impact. One participant spoke about her organisation's reasons for undertaking work with young people, having seen the long term consequences of the lack of specialist support and counselling for rape survivors earlier in their lives.

"We've always been an organisation run by women, for women but we have diversified over the last few years. What motivated us to work with young people is the long-term responses that we were seeing in the adult women who, had they had support at a younger age, had they been believed earlier, had staff had more awareness, then maybe some of the deeply rooted mental health problems could have been avoided." (Colchester Rape Crisis Line)

### **Integration of refugee women into society**

The findings from organisations that worked specifically with refugee and asylum seeking women showed that their advocacy support, through the asylum process, resulted in women at risk of sexual violence and other human rights abuses being made safe.

*"We helped her appeal for asylum and she was granted it. As a result she was allowed to stay in this country and be safe"*

"We had a young woman who had been trafficked into the country from Africa into domestic slavery. We helped her appeal for asylum and she was granted it. As a result she was allowed to stay in this country and be safe." (Refugee Women's Resource Project/Asylum Aid)

### **Summary**

The interviews in this study have shown examples of how through the work of the women's voluntary and community sector, women's lives are transformed – they are free from violence and abuse, they have increased confidence and improved mental health. They are helped to build their lives and get out of poverty through accessing appropriate health and social services, training, education and employment.

## **5.2 Changing communities – the impact on communities**

Women's organisations do not just change the lives of individual women; they also impact on wider communities. One of the most striking impacts of women's access to services that emerged in the interviews is the knock-on effect on their families and communities. As one interviewee pointed out:

"The long-term impact would be people developing more skills to be able to engage more in society and be better parents as well – because these skills are transferred back into

their homes. It's about changing society as a whole because when you educate the mother, you train the mother, you train the whole family don't you?" (South Yorkshire Women's Development Trust)

### **Safer, healthier lives for children**

The impact of violence against women on children is slowly gaining more acknowledgement and understanding, for example the Home Office has recently produced guidance on how to work with children affected by domestic violence (Mullender, 2004). One of the most significant impacts of many of the organisations interviewed in this study was to enable women to protect their children from the effects of violence and abuse.

*"because the children are no longer in a situation where they see dad beat mum, they end up being better children as well"*

"Most women that I've worked with in the past end up having a better life. And because the children are no longer in a situation where they see dad beat mum, they end up being better children as well." (Elevate)

One interviewee described the prevention of mental health and behavioural problems in children affected by violence:

"I think if they didn't have this service, most of them would stay in the situation that they're in and the devastating effect that would have on themselves and their children is just huge. I think quite a lot of women would end up having serious mental health problems and for the children it would obviously continue to be devastating. The impact depends of the age of the child, but obviously, it impacts on the behaviour. For teenagers, it impacts on their willingness to take risks, on their lack of security." (Camden Women's Aid)

### **Children are out of 'care' and returned to families**

Another issue around children that was mentioned by several interviewees was how their work with women often results in women achieving safety and stability so that they can regain custody of their children who had been taken into care. One organisation worked intensively with a new mother with mental health problems and prevented her child being taken into care. As well as the benefits to the health and wellbeing of the child, this has obvious fiscal benefits to public services.

"We had one woman, for instance, who was in a state of terror because it seemed her new baby was going to be taken away. The circumstances were complicated [...] but through constant negotiation, she was eventually allowed to keep her baby. Two or three of us actually agreed to take responsibility for the baby's welfare. We went to the woman's home morning and evening to give support. This wasn't easy, as she was suffering from severe post natal depression, as well as other mental health problems. But nothing went wrong. Soon, she was managing to look after the baby by herself. She started dressmaking. Then she made her own baby food, cooking for the community and establishing a small business. She does relapse every so often; this is the nature of her illness. But basically, she is doing much better." (Black Women's Mental Health Project – from website: [www.bwmhp.org.uk](http://www.bwmhp.org.uk))

### **Women become more active citizens**

Another way in which women's organisation's work improves communities is that the women, who become empowered and more independent through involvement in the organisations, begin to play a more active and positive role in their families and communities. For example:

"In the long term I would hope that women end up in much more fulfilled positions in their lives both in work and in relationship terms and are therefore better mothers, better sisters and better workers but also they are able to contribute to their community in the broadest possible way - by being better neighbours and better volunteers. I think it is also not uncommon for them to leave the role of victim and help someone else along."  
(Haringey Women's Forum)

For one research participant empowerment and independence was about integration into the wider community and society:

"The long-term impact is to make women live in healthy, safe environments within their houses. Where they can exercise their personal rights and freedom, where they can integrate into the wider community taking part in employment, education participation in the wider society." (Middle East Centre for Women's Rights)

For many individuals, volunteering in a women's organisation leads to other kinds of community work. For example some set up social enterprises:

*"she put together a business plan, started a social enterprise, got it registered, got lottery funding and now rents the space to run a breakfast and after school club. So you can follow them through from start to finish"*

"There was a woman who was a volunteer who wanted to be doing something for her community but wasn't sure what. She came into an open day, got involved and became a volunteer caretaker. She felt it was being under used, at the time she wasn't working so with various bits of support she put together a business plan, started a social enterprise, got it registered, got lottery funding and now rents the space to run a breakfast and after school club. So you can follow them through from start to finish. And she still does the volunteer caretaking which I thought was pretty good." (Haringey Women's Forum)

### **Summary**

The interviews in this study demonstrate the relevance to the UK today of the oft-quoted saying, "if you educate a man you educate an individual; if you educate a woman you educate a whole nation". The government is struggling to meet its target of halving child poverty by 2010. This study emphasises as many others have done that improving women's welfare improves the lives of children, particularly through enabling children to live free from violence. In addition, many examples were given of women, who had received support, 'giving back' to their communities and becoming more active and engaged citizens.

## **5.3 Changing society – the impact on government**

Historically, women's organisations have made enormous contributions to the transformation of society in the UK. From the suffragettes onwards, women's organising has given women the right to vote, to own their own property, to protection from unequal pay and discrimination, access to safe, legal abortion, and criminalisation of rape in marriage. The Women's Aid movement has made domestic violence a widely recognised issue, with refuge services now provided in most boroughs. This section looks

at the engagement of women's organisations with policy makers and influencers and the impact that is having today.

Measuring the impact of policy and campaigning is notoriously difficult because of the many factors that are out of the control of a single organisation. Therefore, this section provides an indication of the level of engagement of the women's organisations interviewed in the study, and outlines some of their campaigning successes. The interviews showed that the work of women's organisations impacts greatly on government at both the local and national level. When asked whether their organisations influenced the attitudes of government, 45% confidently argued that their work had an impact on government. For the remaining 55% of organisations, the failure to influence government was attributed to the nature of the work carried out by organisations, the size or lack of resources of organisations and the belief that the impact on government is a difficult factor to assess.

On the whole, the interviews showed that women's organisations actively engage with the governmental apparatus in a variety of ways and raising awareness of the wide range of issues that are of importance to women. The methods they used to influence policy making included:

- Participation in local forums, especially around domestic violence.
- Training public sector workers such as the police.
- Being contracted to develop strategies (e.g. the London Mayor's Domestic Violence Strategy).
- Using second-tier women's organisations (e.g. WRC and Women's Aid) and working in partnership with other women's organisations.
- Using casework to inform policy work.
- Setting up meetings between service users and policy makers.

### **Getting and keeping issues on the agenda**

Women's organisations often work on issues that are 'disconcerting' or not often discussed in the public arena. A key role in the policy-making process that emerged in the interviews was that of raising awareness of issues affecting women that would not otherwise be discussed.

*"we are raising awareness of sexual violence and we have put sexual violence high on the agenda at multi-agency fora"*

"Locally, we are raising awareness of sexual violence and we have put sexual violence high on the agenda at multi-agency fora. People are considering childhood sexual abuse in their programming and commissioning. So, not only are they getting better understanding of the subject, but the people that they are coming into contact with are having a much better service." (Colchester Rape Crisis Line)

Policy issues mentioned by interviewees included criminal justice, mental health, forced marriage, prostitution, no recourse to public funds, domestic and sexual violence, including support for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Interviewees were also involved in general local planning, such as facilitating consultation with marginalised groups on developing local community plans and strategies.

### **Service users' engagement with policy making**

Women's organisations are well placed to enable policy makers to hear the experience of those on whom their policies impact. Several organisations consulted with their service users. For example:

"For the consultation on prostitution, people from the Home Office came out twice to talk to the women. What I learnt through that was that really in order for impact to be made it has to actually be talking to the experts. And the experts in the effects of legislation are the people it impacts on." (women@thewell)

### **Impact of women's organisations' policy work**

The impact of the work of organisations aiming to improve women's legal rights is reflected in the changes brought to the criminal justice system. The impact of these organisations has huge implications on furthering justice. For example, as part of their policy work, Women in Prison changes social attitudes by educating the general public and policy-makers about the criminal justice system and promoting alternatives to custody for women. The work of another organisation interviewed, enables women to access justice through the legal system:

"We do get women contacting us to tell us they got their injunction and this was amazing. They didn't think they could represent themselves and they've done this and they're now free of that violence for the time being. So we get those thank you cards occasionally but it would be hard to talk about an individual case without giving away someone's details." (Anonymous)

The interviews offer several remarkable examples of individual campaign successes of women's organisations, spanning various fields of work –

#### ***Access to domestic violence services for disabled women:***

*"We influenced the government to consider it as a crime. It was the first case that came up under the name of honour killing, and had lots of media coverage"*

"As a result, I feel, of our campaigning, Women's Aid are now, after many years of neglect of disabled women's inclusion, conducting research into disabled women's needs around domestic violence. This is long overdue and very welcome. Also the work one of our members has done on disabled women's issues in Europe over many years has been very helpful to promote our issues, especially around violence and abuse. The work she did has led to a heightened awareness in Europe and action for disabled women. Our website has been used many times by disabled women and organisations to gain an insight into the issues, also the packs we sent out as well as the conference we initially held." (Women's Committee/British Council of Disabled People)

#### ***'Honour' killings:***

"The most important result of our work was about honour killings. It starts with the case of Heshu Yunis and she was killed by her father at 16 years old – she was a Kurdish girl. We influenced the government to consider it as a crime. [...] It was the first case that came up under the name of honour killing, and had lots of media coverage. [...] For the first time, the perpetrator has got 14 years in prison." (Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation)

#### ***Migrant domestic workers' rights:***

"When Kalayaan was established migrant workers didn't have the right to change employers, which in effect made them like slaves. So if they challenged that and lost their job as a result they would be deemed illegal and have to leave England. It really

made them very vulnerable to abuse so Kalayaan was set up to campaign for their rights. [The organisation] was set up in 1987 and the campaign was won 10 years later. Now, we do lots of day-to-day case work to help individuals. Our overall aim is to improve the employment and immigration rights so migrant domestic workers can be recognised as workers in the UK." (Kalayaan)

*"After about eight years of campaigning the Home Office adopted gender guidelines so when they are doing their case work they are supposed to take those into account to actually be more gender sensitive"*

***Protection of trafficked women and asylum seekers:***

"After about eight years of campaigning by the Refugee Women's Legal Group, this project and other people, the Home Office adopted gender guidelines so when they are doing their case work they are supposed to take those into account to actually be more gender sensitive. We are now following this through by researching to what extent these guidelines are being implemented. Refugee Women's Resource Project was very involved in a campaign to ensure that trafficked women accepted into the Poppy Project were entitled to claim asylum and the campaign to protect women living in NASS [National Asylum Support Service] accommodation from domestic violence - NASS now has a policy on this and we are advising them on monitoring it. A current campaign is for gender guidelines to be adopted by all countries in the EU and the UK government tabled our paper suggesting their good practice be spread across Europe at an international meeting in Geneva." (Refugee Women's Resource Project/Asylum Aid)

**Summary**

Women's organisations in the past century achieved the previously unthinkable in gaining for example the right to vote (1928), the decriminalisation of abortion (1967), and the criminalisation of rape in marriage (1991). Today women's organisations are pushing the frontiers further and working towards a vision of an equal Britain by addressing issues that rarely reach public attention, such as trafficking, migrant domestic workers rights, forced marriage and access to support and counselling for survivors of violence and abuse.

# 6. Solutions – the added value of the women's voluntary sector

## 6.1 What is 'added value'?

The issue of the value of the voluntary sector came to the fore in 2002, when the Treasury began a review of the role of the voluntary sector in public service delivery (Treasury 2002). In the 'Cross-Cutting Review', the Treasury set out to identify and define the 'added-value' of the sector's delivery of services. The following characteristics were highlighted as crucial features which voluntary organisations are able to demonstrate:

1. Specialist knowledge, experience and/or skills, i.e. the expertise resulting from direct experience of the user perspective.
2. Particular ways of involving people in service delivery, whether as users of self-help/autonomous groups, i.e. working directly with the service user or service users' family to plan and deliver services.
3. Independence from existing and past structures/models of service. They are not bound by structures in the ways in which more traditional public sector agencies are. Their greater independence means they can deliver services in new and innovative ways.
4. Access to the wider community without institutional baggage. Voluntary and community organisations are independent of government and are free to be unequivocally on the service users' side.
5. Freedom and flexibility from institutional pressures. They can offer responsive services which are user-centred/not driven by budgets and targets within the public sector. (Treasury, 2002.)

Since then, voluntary and community organisations have continued discussions on the 'added value' (and 'distinctiveness') of the sector, relative to the public and commercial sectors. A report from the NCVO draws the following conclusions:

- The greater financial value of the voluntary sector is reflected in the fact that voluntary sector services are believed to be cheaper because they pay lower wages and because volunteers can help deliver services. Furthermore, voluntary organisations are not required to make a profit for stakeholders, which, in theory means that there is greater investment in the quality of service provided.
- User-participation in service provision greatly increases the activity value of the voluntary sector. The experiences of staff or volunteers within the sector are usually qualitatively different from those of volunteers in the public and commercial sectors, because they are more likely to be contributing to core rather than peripheral services and have a bigger role in the development of services.
- The voluntary sector adds "absolute value". The activities of voluntary sector organisations are significantly different to those of the public and commercial sectors, making comparisons between the two misleading. Voluntary organisations have specialist expertise which it would be difficult for the public sector to gain and their role is to innovate the development of services. (Bolton, 2002)

*Voluntary organisations have specialist expertise which it would be difficult for the public sector to gain and their role is to innovate the development of services*

Below, we use data from the interviews in this study to explore the added value of the women's voluntary and community sector. Because this study cannot directly compare women's organisations with mainstream voluntary organisations (we only interviewed women's organisations) we do not aim to provide a definitive analysis of the women's sector's added value. However, it is possible to explore some of the key features of women's organisations, which contribute to the notion of added value.

The key features of women's organisations that emerged from the interviews illustrate government and voluntary sector analyses of added value, namely through:

- Provision of women-only space
- Focus on empowerment and independence
- High level of service user involvement
- Integrated, one-stop-shop services
- Needs-based approach
- Reaching 'hard to reach' women

## 6.2 Provision of women-only space

The most obvious service that women's organisations provide that is rarely offered by mainstream organisations is women-only space, whether for service users or those running the organisation. This section explores how widespread women-only spaces were among organisations interviewed, as well what interviewees' views on women-only spaces were in general.

*Women-only spaces were described by many as "crucial", "vital", "important" and "necessary"*

Eighty-nine per cent of organisations interviewed in this study had a women-only space or service. Those that did not, were generally either second-tier organisations (not delivering services to individuals) or they were very small and did not have the capacity to have a women-only space. Women-only spaces were described by many as "crucial", "vital", "important" and "necessary":

"I think it's incredibly important. [...] There are women that I have known for 10-15 years, and I've seen what Powerhouse has done for them in terms of the confidence and the growth. I don't think that would have been achieved if it wasn't a women-only space." (Powerhouse)

"We need to make sure that women feel absolutely comfortable accessing our services. If they were not comfortable they wouldn't come - we wouldn't have such demand." (Women in Prison)

"Having accessed this women-only space for 15 years myself, having been a part of it for 15 years as a volunteer and having been a paid worker for three years, I think women-only spaces are vital. They're vital for the positive functioning of society, for women to have time out to share experiences with each other and to seek support and empathy from each other." (Hillingdon Women's Centre)

Interestingly, although some interviewees spoke about women from particular ethnic or religious backgrounds preferring women-only spaces (or men only allowing them to participate if the service or activity is women-only), the reasons given for the effectiveness of women-only spaces were similar across all groups, and many of the

strongest supporters of women-only spaces were from white-led groups. Of the 44 organisations interviewed, 28 (64%) had no male staff, volunteers or trustees and had a policy that they would not have male staff. All the refuges interviewed fell into this category.

The main reasons given for this were that the organisation needed a women-only space because service users who had experienced violence from men needed a safe space to heal. For example:

*"we think that this needs to be a really safe space for them. And for us that means it being women-only"*

"It's because we have prisoners and ex-prisoners working as volunteers here and we have phone calls all the time from women prisoners and ex-prisoners. Because of the really difficult experiences that many of them have had in relation to men, we think that this needs to be a really safe space for them. And for us that means it being women-only." (Women In Prison)

A quarter of interviewees (12) said that they had either had male staff in the past, or that they currently had a male trustee, volunteer or contractor within their projects, although usually not in frontline work, particularly advice or advocacy. One organisation was developing domestic violence prevention work with young men on probation and was planning to recruit male staff to that project. Some interviewees spoke about the benefits of having male staff or volunteers, for example:

"Yes, we have male tutors. We are women-only in our delivery rather than our employment. [...] Women learning together are less competitive than women working with men. [...] But having some support and delivery by men is quite beneficial." (Hillcroft College)

"We are exploring ways of encouraging men to be volunteers. Some of our volunteers visit people in hospitals who are affected by HIV/AIDS and others visit people in detention centres and we would like men to be involved in this. We would like to share the burden of care, you know, reduce it from women and also encourage men to take part." (Zimbabwe Women's Network)

However, for some organisations, the women-only space was so important that it meant employing male staff or volunteers was not an option:

"A lot of progressive men want to work in women's organisations, and even if they are really sensitive it's not right for this moment. We provide a women-only space so that women can come here and feel safe and know that they will be helped by women and they won't see any men here. And it's very important for them to see women doing this - and thinking that they can do something like that in the future." (Latin American Women's Rights Service)

Despite the crucial role that women-only spaces played in the service provision of organisations interviewed, participants' comments echoed the findings from other research which stated that women's organisations "are frequently asked to justify why they should be funded because they do not offer a service to men or are a women only project" (Hodgson, 2004, page 10). Several respondents stressed that women-only spaces were often perceived as threatening:

"They [women-only spaces] are useful and they're often misunderstood. They are

sometimes perceived as threatening, by men or by communities. However, we have provided successful support services and opportunities for women that wouldn't have otherwise been available through mixed gender spaces. I think women-only spaces are necessary." (Winner Project/Preston Road Women's Centre)

"I really think there is a place in society for women-only services and women-only groups. One day there may not be because we have a society that is truly equal but that ain't happening fast enough and it certainly isn't going to happen in my lifetime. [...] I can't understand why people feel so threatened by women-only services – why is there such an emphasis on mainstreaming the women's sector and women's services when there are clear advantages to be had from these organisations existing?" (Anonymous)

### **Women are more comfortable to express themselves and articulate their needs**

Many interviewees spoke about the way women behave differently in a women-only space compared to a mixed space. This included expressing themselves more freely or confidently and being comfortable to speak about their needs and experiences:

"I think that there is a need for women-only spaces. For example, every year we have a social event for women and children only. If it were a mixed event, there might be some reluctance to be open about certain things. Women might not speak, they might not express their views within the community. Lots of men still have power. For women, what you feel and what you can say out in public are two different things." (Kiran Asian Women's Aid)

*"When women come, I almost feel a sense of a huge relief to hear the word 'lesbian' banded around again, like it's alright, like there's nothing wrong with it!"* "From the women's group, I've understood very clearly that they appreciate and come to that women-only and lesbian-only space. [...] When women come, I almost feel a sense of a huge relief to hear the word 'lesbian' banded around again, like it's alright, like there's nothing wrong with it! I think, 'you can just say 'lesbian' and be lesbian in here and it's fine!'" (Women's Voice/Kairos in Soho)

### **Women are less constrained or intimidated away from the 'male gaze'**

Several interviewees spoke about the benefits of not feeling looked at by men, and the freedom this gives women, which was sometimes described as being less 'constrained' or 'intimidated'.

"I think they [women-only spaces] are crucial, they are important in allowing women to come, to feel safe, to open up, to feel safe to share their experiences. Often you find that because of the way they have been socialised, women find it difficult to open up where men are for fear of being intimidated but also of being labelled as someone working against their culture. Where women's spaces are available, women feel more able to communicate their problems and issues, especially issues of a personal nature but also issues around sexual health, discussing what the problems are and the challenges they face in their marriage. They find it easier to talk about those things in women-only spaces." (Zimbabwe Women's Network)

"I volunteer in Holloway Prison and the breast-feeding rate is much higher than in the local population because there aren't any men to not support it. [...] [Women] are actually quite supportive to each other in the mother and baby unit and they do feed and they help each other. In the absence of a bloke who thinks that her breasts are his ownership it is actually quite successful a lot of the time." (Haringey Women's Forum)

### **Women are able to 'take stock' before going out into mainstream, mixed spaces**

Several interviewees spoke about women-only spaces as necessary for women to 'take stock' and gain confidence before going out into the mainstream. One described the role of her organisation as providing "a respite from the challenges that women are getting in their lives from their partners and employers" (Haringey Women's Forum). In women-only spaces, women can focus on their needs that are often overlooked in mixed spaces that become male-dominated. One interviewee stressed that women-only spaces were essential for women to successfully influence the mainstream.

"I think women-only spaces are absolutely essential to provide that safe space where we can meet, discuss, share, learn from each other, gain confidence, plan and then take that out to the mainstream." (Women's Environmental Network)

### **Women-only leadership ensures women's needs are met**

Interviewees spoke about the importance of women-only spaces within the governance of the organisation – to ensure that women's needs were met.

"I think [if we were not women-led] it would be gender neutral and that is not always the most helpful philosophy to adopt when you're addressing disadvantage. For instance, our domestic violence service is based on the power and control model, which is gender specific and it wouldn't work if the centre was governed by a mixed gender committee. I think having mixed gender governance might also dilute the focus of the organisation which is about addressing women's needs. We're able to be very clear about what we do and what we don't do and that's not about being anti-male, it's about there being disadvantages that women face because of their gender. The best way we can see to address that is by having a safe women-only space providing all female role models." (Winner Project/Preston Road Women's Centre)

"We wanted women to speak for themselves. We found that when women were in an ordinary group with women and men they let the men speak and they also worked towards a man's agenda. They did not speak for themselves and they did not take leadership roles [...] and their needs were not being met." (Black Women's Mental Health Project)

### **Women-only services delivering better outcomes than mixed spaces**

For some of the interviewees, women-only space was essential to the effective running of the organisation – it would be impossible to achieve their aims and meet the needs of their service users without it. Two organisations spoke about having tried to run their services in a mixed environment and finding it ineffective:

*"having a couple of men in the classes changed that balance - women weren't allowed to go at their own pace or their confidence was undermined."*

"We ran [some] DIY courses for housing associations who didn't want them to be women-only [...] and we had a few male participants on the courses. What we found was that unintentionally, because of the way we have gender stereotyping, they actually knew more than they thought they did about DIY, and they inadvertently ended up undermining the women on the course [...] by saying 'oh, we know this already', or trying to move on too quickly, or by being bored, or not supporting those women. [...] We want to run the courses to empower and enable women to have confidence, and to go at their pace, and having a couple of men in the classes changed that balance - women weren't allowed to go at their own pace or their confidence was undermined." (Anonymous)

"Although originally men were allowed to come in, I think it was recognised after a while that there was a need for a female-only environment to learn in, for the women to feel safe and secure, particularly for ex-offenders, among whom rates of child abuse and domestic violence were high." (Creative and Supportive Trust)

One interviewee described the negative experience of a woman who had tried to access a service in a mainstream organisation:

"[A woman who had been raped] had gone to one of the larger mainstream organisations and she said she got to speak to a male volunteer there. He gave her half an hour of his time and told her she had to 'get on with her life', that that was probably 'the best thing for her'. This was quite appalling. [...] These mainstream organisations are often quite well funded and well respected but on the ground the experience is somewhat different, depending obviously on which branch you go to." (Anonymous)

Interviewees highlighted the ways the existence of a women-only space produced better outcomes for the organisation. Whether in relation to interaction between staff or service users, many organisations spoke about the importance of interacting with others who have had the same experience as oneself. For some, this helped women develop an analysis of their experience, for example that discrimination is not their individual fault but part of a general pattern of behaviour and ideology directed at women within society. In the case of Tower Hamlet's Women's Aid, women develop a shared analysis of violence against women through their contact with the organisation:

*"When they leave, they feel that there are options that they can take in order to protect themselves and their children."*

"Our service users recognise that what's happened to them is part of a more general pattern, rather than their fault. Because mostly service users come in thinking that they're to blame, that they're weak and they've been told that over a number of years. When they leave, they feel that there are options that they can take in order to protect themselves and their children." (Tower Hamlets Women's Aid)

A report by one of the interviewed organisations, the Asian Women's Resource Centre, echoed the importance of contact with people in a similar situation to oneself, in a quote by one of their service users:

"It was only after I came to the group that I realised how many women are in my position, sometimes in worse situations than me. I feel if they can get out of their predicament, so can I." (Asian Women's Resource Centre, 2005, p.5)

## 6.3 Focus on empowerment and independence

The term 'empower' was often used in the interviews, in relation to the way women's organisations work and the impact they have on their service users. Twenty-one organisations (48%) referred explicitly to empowerment of the women they work with, which was generally achieved through helping women regain control, equipping women with information and developing support networks.

"Success is a woman who actually feels able to articulate her own needs. So she's not only taking what you offer, but she's actually able to say is.'What I need for me is...' " (women@thewell)

By providing women with information, skills or access to informal support networks, the women's organisations in this study empowered women to gain more independence and control over their lives. Ultimately, this equipped women to take more active roles in their own lives and their communities.

### **Helping women regain control**

The issue of women's self determination (women controlling their own lives) was consistently reiterated by the women's organisations in this research. In particular, violence against women, which affects a large proportion of those accessing women's organisations, often involves extreme lack of control over their lives and bodies.

*"it's not just support, it's also empowerment"*

"You know, it's just helping women to rebuild their lives but also empowering them to do as much as possible for themselves because very often, part of their experience of abuse has been not being able to do certain things. So it's not just support, it's also empowerment, very much so." (Brent Women's Aid)

Empowerment was described as women taking charge of their own development. For example, one interviewee described how the organisation had changed its approach from a support role to an empowerment role, and that this was much more effective:

"We're actually moving more towards secondary advocacy, so getting the women together to advocate for themselves and for other women with learning disabilities. [...] It moves the organisation and the individuals forward much faster than what we were [previously] trying to do - one-to-one for everybody: it was endless and we couldn't meet anybody's needs. [...] We support women to support each other, and to grow in skills as well as in actually solving problems, so that people are developing generic skills that they can apply in their life." (Powerhouse)

"The women who come to us, the men in their lives [...] have abused the power that they have. And so, you know, apart from offering safe accommodation and practical advice and support around benefits and housing and so on, we seek to empower women, we seek to help them to get back in touch with their own power." (Barking and Dagenham Women's Aid/Eaves Housing for Women)

### **Equipping women with information so they can self-advocate**

Empowerment is often facilitated through information, so that women learn about the variety of options open to them and are able to make informed decisions which are appropriate to their circumstances. By accessing services, women develop confidence, acquire the terminology and are given the space to express their feelings and opinions. Together, these approaches enable many women to articulate their views, needs and aspirations in the wider world:

"One of the things that all our projects do is give women more confidence, more knowledge, it's an empowering thing. Where they have these feelings about things, we bring it out in the open to discuss it. We give them the language to talk about the things they feel. They learn some technical knowledge, they learn a bit about reading drawings and they also learn about how the things work. They understand how positions are taken, how planning authorities work. So even after the project has finished, they have that knowledge so they could approach their local councillor, go to the media. [You could say] this is what your planning authority is supposed to be doing, this is how architects work.

I hope that's the sort of legacy that stays with the women." (Women's Design Service)  
"Women have come to us wanting information on how they can get housing and they've been able to self-advocate. We've given them information about their rights in terms of housing but also where to go. We find that once they're equipped with the information they need, they go and seek help for themselves. So, we have women who have gone into jobs as a result of the training that we've done." (Zimbabwe Women's Network)

One interviewee spoke explicitly about the way her organisation gives non-directional advice, so that women make up their own minds about what to do with the information:

"We don't ever say to a woman 'this is what you should do'. We say 'look, this is what the law says, these are your legal rights, these are your legal remedies' and it's up to her once she's been given this information to determine which, if any, of those courses of action she may wish to follow." (Anonymous)

### **Developing support networks**

Contact with other service users was highlighted as an important step towards the empowerment of women in the long-term. Through the identification of a common experience, women develop friendships and support networks:

"It gives people friendships really, and support. I see women blossom, just from coming and feeling equal to others, and not being passive recipients of a day service, but actually coming to a group that they feel they own and belong to. [...] With the leisure project, once a month we go somewhere. We've been to the women's FA cup final, we've been to the pub, we've been out for a meal. It's about the women arranging it themselves. We have just employed our first support worker with a learning disability to support others to meet up, make friends and broaden social networks. Hopefully those will cascade outside of the project as people build up their own support networks." (Powerhouse)

## **6.4 High level of service user involvement and peer support**

A quarter of interviewees stressed that their service users were involved in a wide range of functions within their organisations, spanning the areas of governance and service provision. Women with direct experience of the issues being addressed by organisations were found to be involved in Management Committees, on Partnership Boards, as members of the organisations and as paid employees and volunteers. For example at Positively Women (an organisation which supports HIV-positive women), the front-line staff are all HIV-positive themselves. The interviews indicate that much of the impetus behind ex-service user involvement comes from ex-service users themselves who are inspired to volunteer for the organisations, as well as to follow career paths in the women's sector:

*"She's said 'I want to be a youth worker', so the organisation will support her in locating that training and in moving her on"*

"There was a young woman who had attended the project as a young parent, she was very anxious, had low self-esteem and had been fairly isolated. Now she's a volunteer mentor on a YPDP [Young People's Development Programme]. She's linked to Millennium Volunteers from which she gets recognition for the hours she does for her volunteering. She now knows the career path she wants to take. She's said 'I want to be a youth worker', so the organisation will support her in locating that training and in moving her on." (GFS Platform)

For some of the smaller organisations, there was no distinction between the service provider and the service user:

"If it wasn't run by women it wouldn't exist, because we're the ones, it's all about sharing. We're sharing what we're going through. It's not like some kind of advisory centre where you come and get advice, because if that was the case then men could go to school and get the advice to give to women, but we're a group of women. It's run by the same women who belong to it, if you see what I mean. So we run it; we look after it ourselves. Basically, we are going through what we're going through, we know what we need and that's why we can run it." (Mamas and Babies)

Peer-support or self-help are crucial elements of service-user involvement within organisations interviewed, for example the Black Women's Mental Health Project. Indeed, one interviewee pointed out that that is how most women's groups are set up:

"It was like any other sister organisation, it basically started with a group of women coming together and saying they needed some information. [...] So it was really to address issues that mainstream services weren't providing." (Asian Women's Resource Centre)

"Well, because this organisation was created by a group of women who were working in housing and they saw many women coming to their organisation for advice. They realised we were Latin American women who, when they moved to a refuge, were isolated, some of them experienced racism and there was a need to create a women's refuge for Latin American women. The organisation developed from a group of women doing voluntary work." (Latin American Women's Aid)

#### **Ex-service users as staff**

*Five of the interviewees in this study were ex-service users themselves*

Five of the interviewees in this study (11%) – who were usually managers of the organisations – were ex-service users themselves. Their experience offers invaluable insight into the benefits of ex-service user involvement in women's organisations:

"I had my first son in the refuge – that was 11 years ago when I suffered from domestic violence. I was pregnant at the time and my midwife called the police and they put me in a refuge. I had my son in the refuge. I didn't have my immigration papers and my husband didn't want to give them to me – he was abusing me physically, financially. I was damaged. From the refuge I applied for my papers. I had a good solicitor. And from the midwife as well. I was able to get my indefinite leave to remain. I went to university, got my degree, and then I felt like giving it back. Therefore, I work here. So I'm a living example. At that time I didn't know my rights as a woman. I was married to this man, I didn't know I could get 'leave to remain', I didn't know I could call the police... He told me if I called the police they would deport me, and I believed him. So now, I let women know that they have rights as a human being, as a citizen." (Elevate)

For many organisations, service user involvement was described as being closely linked to the process of empowering service users, for example:

"One of the things that I've witnessed [...] is the numbers of young women who've entered the project as a service user, who have either moved on to become volunteers or who have actually got to be paid employees. It's quite fascinating to see how young women have progressed throughout the organisation and have then moved on from our

*"we encourage peer-education and peer-mentoring where we will give opportunities to young women"*

organisation into other posts. I mean, one of the ways in which we work is we encourage peer-education and peer-mentoring programmes where we will give opportunities to young women who have been part of the process and then give them training to support other women" (GFS platform)

## 6.5 Integrated 'one-stop-shop' services

Twenty per cent of organisations in this study offered a wide range of different services. They performed the function of a traditional 'women's centre', although most did not use that description. It was not uncommon for organisations with under ten staff (sometimes under five) to provide support on issues ranging from domestic violence and rape crisis, benefits information, legal and immigration advice, interpretation, training, pregnancy testing, job search support, and to run support groups.

"Women are looking for an organisation that does more than one thing and therefore can unwrap any and many of their various problems. They can be in more than one of our services at once, for example they can be in our counselling programme at the same time as having their housing dealt with, and I think that's really reassuring for them. They can come to the same building once a week and they get to know the staff and build a rapport with them." (Haringey Women's Forum)

"When women come to us we try to develop trusting relationships with them and we try to find out what some of their needs are. Sometimes people are in crisis situations and need immediate help and support, for example around domestic violence where they may need an immediate referral to the refuge. Others may be new to the area, they want to know about services, they want to meet other women in similar situations and basically they come and they get involved with some of the trips that we do and network with each other. We talk to the women and assess their needs, then refer them to the appropriate worker." (Asian Women's Resource Centre)

Even for organisations offering a very specific, specialised service, there is often an emphasis on assessing the woman's entire situation and needs and providing an integrated service based this. For example:

"We try to have a holistic approach so all the women's needs are supported - do they need housing, social services, a solicitor, police?" (Colchester Rape Crisis Line)

## 6.6 Needs-based approach

Another theme that arose from several of the interviews was organisations responding to needs of the service users and tailoring the organisations' activities accordingly. Examples included Powerhouse's training programme that develops tailor-made workshops in direct response to needs identified by other projects within the organisation. Other examples were:

"For anything that affects women in their lives we try to be responsive to their needs. So, child care, health and safety issues, issues around domestic violence and abuse, education and training and developing confidence and self-esteem." (Winner Project/Preston Road Women's Centre)

"We do fast-track English classes for pre-school children so that they learn English through play and creative activities. This was a need that was identified by women. They were saying that very often, young children live within the extended family and are brought up by grandparents who don't speak the language, so by the time they go into school they are at a disadvantage compared to other children." (Asian Women's Resource Centre)

## 6.7 Reaching 'hard-to-reach' women

On the whole, the interviews showed that the ways in which women's organisations work (namely through providing women-only space, strong connections between service users and staff and needs-based services) means that they often work successfully with women who are not accessing other services. In the case of some organisations, specific measures were taken to ensure women were not excluded from their service such as providing a crèche. This enabled them to work with women that other services could not reach. In other cases, interviewees stressed that they were able to reach certain women because of the manner and technique of the staff in providing a "woman-centred" approach:

*"Often when these young women are referred from statutory services we are told that they're 'trouble makers', they're 'aggressive' and they'll muck you about. We have had none of these problems with any of the young women. It's obviously linked to the way you actually work"*

"In our experience young women that have been 'written off by the system', that are in care, seen as challenging, disruptive etc provide very positive feedback on SERICC's services. We believe this is because we work from a woman centred approach, using language that they feel comfortable with, they don't feel judged. Often when these young women are referred from statutory services we are told that they're 'trouble makers', they're 'aggressive', they do this, they do that, they won't turn up and they'll muck you about. We have had none of these problems with any of the young women. It's obviously linked to the way you actually work and the way you present yourself as a service." (South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre)

One interviewee felt that her organisation's "holistic, intensive way of working is what makes the most difference" in being able to successfully work with women who might otherwise be excluded from services. She gave an example of the success of the way support workers build relationships with service users over time with "continuity, flexibility to respond to what she [the service user] wants and needs" (Women in Prison).

Many organisations talked about the importance of a welcoming atmosphere in the organisation and the effect this had on service users. For example, Haringey Women's Forum described how there is always fruit and biscuits and the fridge is considered open-access, which "means that they gain a sense of ownership of the organisation, they gain a kind of feeling of belonging. They have been told they're allowed to do that and that it's ok, it's not 'staff' and 'client' which leaves them with a sense of comfort. We deal with their needs pretty quickly but we also nurture them and help them to grow."

Some interviewees in well-established organisations described the role they played in the community whereby local people knew the organisation well and women in extreme need were referred to the organisation by passers-by. The example below indicates this role that women's organisations often play and describes the on-going, intensive support they provide to some of the most marginalised people in society:

"Women come to approach us who have been literally referred to us by people in the street. [...] An example of this was when a woman from Newham was brought to us by a shopkeeper. She was four months pregnant and had been thrown out from her matrimonial home. She had just arrived from Pakistan and had no idea of the services that were available. Her husband hadn't allowed her to even get on a bus or to do anything on her own. When she came here there were issues around no recourse to public funds, where she was going to live, what she was going to eat. [...] It was only after her baby was born that she got support from social services. [...] And two years down the line [...] she has been granted leave to remain now. She is more empowered, she gets on the bus on her own, her child is going to school. She's actually feeling a lot more independent. Sometimes when women come to us they don't see the light at the end of the tunnel and so part of our role is to say there is light at the end of the tunnel, we've just got to be there to support them through that whole process." (Asian Women's Resource Centre)

### **Summary**

The findings from interviews conducted with the 44 organisations reflect certain common trends regarding 'added value' within the women's sector. It is evident that women's organisations do not merely 'add value' relative to the public and commercial sectors, but rather define need and conduct service provision in ways which add 'absolute value' (Bolton, 2002). The provision of women-only space and the high level of service user involvement were found to be the factors which added the greatest value to service provision and which make women's organisations effective in meeting women's needs.

# 7 Barriers – women's organisations' exclusion from funding

This chapter gives an overview of changes to voluntary and community sector funding and uses interview data to explore how funding issues affect women's organisations.

This research identified barriers women's organisations face in common with the rest of the voluntary and community sector such as short term funding, increasing bureaucracy and funding for core costs. However, the interviews also identified barriers that are specific to women's organisations such as the lack of political priority given to women/gender, policy failing to meet women's needs and a lack of awareness of the women's sector.

## 7.1 Funding the voluntary and community sector

The latest research about the UK voluntary and community sector shows that in 2003/04 the sector's total income was £26.3 billion. However, sector income is concentrated in a small number of organisations – over two-thirds of total sector income is generated by only 2% of charities. Whilst sector income had increased, this is mainly due to an increase in the number of new charities since 2002/03 rather than an increase in individual charities' incomes: "Individual organisations would appear to be doing less well as average incomes for all organisations in the sector were either static or falling" (NCVO, 2006). For those organisations with an annual income of £10k-£100k, total income for this range had actually decreased (NCVO, 2006). Over a quarter of organisations interviewed in this study were in this income bracket.

For many years, government funding has been the mainstay of the voluntary and community sector's income. In 2003/04, public sector funding accounted for 38% of the voluntary and community sector's income, a small increase from 2001/02.

However as a percentage of central government spending, funding of the voluntary and community sector is small. In 2001/02, government funding of voluntary and community organisations accounted for approximately 1% of all government spending, down from the early 1980s to mid-1990s during which period it accounted for 1.5% to 2% (Mocroft and Zimmeck, 2004).

The last five years have seen significant shifts in the government's approach (at local, regional and central levels) to the role of the voluntary and community sector and how it is funded.

*The first shift for some funders was from a form of 'investing' in organisations to open bidding*

The first shift for some funders was from a form of 'investing' in organisations to open (competitive) bidding. Open bidding involves more tightly defined service areas and criteria against which applications from voluntary and community organisations are assessed. The funding programme is widely advertised and open. For example, the Association of London Government (ALG) implemented open bidding in 2002, replacing

the former system of largely refunding the same organisations on a yearly basis. Most government agencies implement an open bidding model in their grant giving activities.

*the government has moved to procuring from the voluntary sector*

Most recently, the government has moved to procuring from the voluntary sector. The procurement (or "shopping") model is increasingly being implemented by government in its bid to increase the role of the voluntary and community sector in public service delivery (Unwin, 2004). Procurement is:

"...the acquisition of goods and services from a third party supplier [e.g. voluntary and community organisations] under legally binding contractual terms....Such transactions are *for the direct benefit of the contracting authority*, necessary for the delivery of the services it provides [e.g. public services such as health, waste and educational services] or for the running of its own business." (Bristol Compact Working Group, p.5. Italics our emphasis)

By contrast, grant giving is:

"...financial support to an organisation or community group in an area of work, *designed and proposed by that organisation or group*, which [the funder] wants to sponsor. The work carried out by the organisation or community group would be deemed to add value to a public body's overall aims or objectives." (Bristol Compact Working Group, p6. Italics our emphasis)

In practice, grant giving tends to be more focussed on meeting needs identified by the applying organisation within (usually quite broad) priority areas stipulated by the funder whereas procurement is where the funder is seeking tenders to meet very specific requirements and is contracting out activities that it would normally be expected to deliver (public services).

Although procuring from the voluntary and community sector is still relatively new, many organisations have expressed concern about the change:

- The delivery of public services may undermine the independence of the sector to criticise government
- The public (e.g. services users and donators) may view charities delivering public services as an arm of the state, thereby compromising organisation's the integrity and independence in the minds of the public
- Grant giving funding may be shifted to procurement funding
- Procurement could favour larger, generic organisations and discriminate against smaller and/or specialist organisations.

This funding model is becoming increasingly popular with fee income now representing 53% of the voluntary sector's income from government, having overtaken grant income as a result of the shift from grants to contracts (NCVO, 2006).

## 7.2 General funding threats and barriers

Like other voluntary and community organisations, women's organisations face a range of threats and barriers to their survival and development. Undoubtedly, funding is the single most identified issue - a persistent problem which is well known to both the

voluntary and community sector and its funders. The women's organisations in this research had similar experiences of funding problems.

A recent report from The Committee of Public Accounts (2006) succinctly notes several of the main funding issues impacting on the voluntary sector including that the voluntary sector is often subject to greater scrutiny, monitoring and audit than the private sector and little hard data exists on how funding is distributed. The Committee also noted that 72% of Home Office funding contracts are for less than one year.

### **Short-term funding**

The issue identified most often was short-term funding. Research participants identified that the nature of the issues they are endeavouring to address are long-term problems (such as poverty, gender discrimination and violence against women) which require long-term and sustained interventions. If funding can not be found to sustain a project or service at the end of the (usually three year) funding cycle, service users often have nowhere else to go. Work with service users may be gradual and incremental over an extended period of time, for example it may take several years of working with a woman experiencing domestic violence before she is able to leave a violent partner or live free of violence and its impacts. The consequence of short-term funding on organisations was that they were not able to plan or develop the organisation. The cost to the organisation in terms of human resources was of particular concern with many organisations being unable to recruit and retain skilled staff because of the unstable and insecure nature of the individual's employment.

*These issues require long-term commitment to bring about change, which is being hindered by short-sighted, 'crisis' strategies*

Connected to short-term funding were concerns that funders' emphasis on 'new' and 'innovative' projects failed to acknowledge that many of the issues women's organisations worked with were persistent and multi-layered problems, such as discrimination in employment. These issues require long-term commitment to bring about change, which is being hindered by short-sighted, 'crisis' strategies.

### **Limited capacity for fundraising and bureaucracy**

The lack of capacity and skills in fundraising impeded organisations' ability to develop and implement strategic funding plans. On this issue, participants spoke about larger organisations that were seen to have a distinct advantage over smaller and/or specialist organisations because they could afford professional fundraising staff, already have the capacity and infrastructure in place to deliver extra services and/or manage large grants and contracts and may be seen by funders as more cost effective. With the shift to procurement and increasingly larger amounts of funding (such as Learning and Skills Council/European Social Fund Co-financing funding programmes), this concern is growing amongst women's organisations.

The majority of participants spoke about the costs of writing unsuccessful applications and the drain on the organisation's already over-stretched resources. Added to this was the bureaucracy associated with funding, particularly having to collect and collate different types of monitoring and evaluation data for each funder. Black and minority ethnic and refugee women's organisations also mentioned difficulties in writing effective applications because of language barriers.

### **Funders' failure to implement full-cost recovery**

The lack of core funding and the failure to implement full-cost recovery (across government funders) is seriously undermining the sustainability of women's organisations

and is particularly impacting on staff salaries. One organisation reported using reserves to keep the organisation running, a dangerous position for any group but especially so for women's organisations given the need for higher reserves to cover any enhanced maternity pay and maternity cover of all women staff. With the lack of core funding, women's organisations are bearing a disproportionate share of risk in the funder/funded relationship:

"...we have been running down our reserves to continue to deliver the work that we have undertaken. We have been successful in being awarded project funding, but we don't have any core funding apart from four-fifths of one salary. So we don't have core funding for anything other than that - we don't have money for rent, photocopying, leaflets, accounts, payroll, other than just one salary." (Anonymous)

### **Increased competition for funding**

As always, the demand for resources far outweighs what is actually available and increased competition for funding is a familiar issue. Three organisations identified 'mission drift' and the temptation many women's organisations face to 'shoehorn' or change their organisation's remit or purpose to fit funding criteria. However participants stated that their organisations made strategic decisions not to chase funding and that this had delivered benefits in the long run.

Many participants reported a 'knock-on' effect whereby funding to their organisations was being cut or reduced because the funding body had overspent or itself had received reduced income.

### **Premises**

*Even if they were able to secure funding to deliver a new service, many organisations struggled to find additional or larger premises*

Many of the women's organisations reported that the lack of affordable, appropriate premises was limiting the growth of their organisations. Even if they were able to secure funding to deliver a new service, many organisations struggled to find additional or larger premises from which to deliver it or to house any additional staff. Accessibility was also identified as an important premises issue, both physical accessibility and also reasonable proximity to public transport etc.

## **7.3 Funding problems specific to women's organisations**

The funding problems identified above are not exclusive to the women's sector and are well identified in other voluntary and community research. However, this research identified that women's organisations are experiencing other, different types of funding threats and barriers, in comparison with generic organisations of the same size or in the same field of work.

In order to determine if women's organisations experience unique funding problems, and to understand why this may happen, it is necessary to examine the early years of the women's voluntary and community sector.

### **Early years of the women's voluntary and community sector**

The Women's Liberation Movement and second wave feminism of the 1970s and 1980s was instrumental in a number of important public policy developments. Through the Women's Liberation Movement, women throughout the UK were mobilised in numbers not seen since the massive demonstrations of the suffragette era.

The key aim of the women's movement was to secure better and fairer rights and protection for women – to promote women's equality and bring about the end of discrimination. The extent to which this aim was achieved is evident in the freedoms, rights and protections that women (and men) enjoy, and take for granted, today – women are legally entitled to equal pay, contraception is accessible, discrimination against women in the workplace is unlawful, domestic and sexual violence is a criminal offence, women can open bank accounts and apply for loans and credit in their own right and much more.

However, the legacy of the Women's Liberation Movement is not limited to the changes brought about in public policy (or indeed public opinion). It is no accident that many women's organisations have been operating for over 20 years. Although women's organisations, such as the YWCA and the Women's Institute, have been part of the charity landscape for many decades, it was the women's movement of the 1970s which was directly responsible for the 'birth' of organised, community based services for women, by women, or what can be described in today's terms as the women's voluntary and community sector. In many ways these pioneering women's organisations were radical for their time – black, Asian, disabled, lesbian and bisexual, and working class women were identifying issues affecting women in their communities, developing innovative responses and campaigning for change.

#### **Funding to the women's sector**

The beginning of the women's voluntary and community sector (i.e. its link to the women's movement) is directly relevant to any analysis of funding to women's organisations over the past 20 years. However, towards the mid-1980s, women's organisations, directly assisted by a strong political agenda of women's equality, experienced a period of unprecedented financial support.

For example in 1983/84, the Greater London Council's (GLC) Women's Committee distributed £6.2 million in grants to London organisations: £3.5 million to childcare projects and the remaining £2.7 million to women's centres and other projects for women, including a ring-fenced sum of £500,000 for services and projects for older women (GLC Women's Committee, 1984). With the abolition of the Greater London Council in 1986, several women's organisations and services were forced to close or scale back services and staff, although many organisations continued to be funded by local councils and/or the Local Borough Grants Committee (now the Association of London Government Grants Scheme).

*only 1.2% of central government funding to the voluntary sector went to women's organisations throughout the UK*

Some women's organisations (having witnessed the closure of many women's organisations over the past 20 years and/or narrowly escaping closure themselves) have commented, with deep concern, that funding to the women's sector has worsened. Their comments are certainly supported by what initial evidence exists, which indicates that statutory grant funding to the women's sector has decreased significantly in real terms.

For example, in 2002/03, only 1.2% (slightly over £14 million) of central government funding to the voluntary and community sector went to women's organisations throughout the UK (Mocroft and Zimmeck, 2004). The equivalent value of the GLC grants for women's organisations in 1983/84 for London alone, in real terms, almost matches this at approximately £13 million.

When the real term value of the GLC grants to London women's organisations is compared with its successor, the ALG Grants Scheme, the difference becomes even starker.

In total, the ALG funds 74 projects specifically for women in 61 organisations to a total of £4,180,734 per annum and 78% of these projects are delivered by women's organisations. Overall, 'women' (either as specified beneficiaries or women's organisations) receive 15% of the ALG's annual funding and make up approximately 16% of the 457 projects funded. Women's organisations (on their own) receive almost 12% of the ALG's total funding, a significantly higher percentage than funding received from central government coffers, and makes the ALG one of the largest and key funders of the London women's sector. The ALG's total voluntary and community sector funding has remained fairly static since 1986 at around £27 million which means it is worth around half of its 1986 value in real terms (Michael Bell Associates, 2005).

The parliamentary vote, instigated by a Conservative government, to close the GLC was only narrowly won. The era in which the GLC operated provides a good indication of the mixed political environment in which the women's sector was operating. On one hand the political environment was indifferent (at best) and hostile (at worst) to the aims of the women's movement. On the other, many gains for women had been made, as a result of direct pressure from the women's movement, and there (still) existed commitment and action to women's equality, both at a political level (as demonstrated in the activities and grants of the GLC) and at 'grassroots' level (a burgeoning women's sector).

Struggles for women's equality at an individual level are often centred on access to resources (for example, women workers striking for equal pay) and this is mirrored in the struggles of women's organisations for a fairer slice of the voluntary and community sector funding pie. As illustrated in section 2.1, the women's sector is under-resourced and under-valued and the "political rhetoric about women's equality fails to be matched by public investment in women's organisations" (Riordan, 1999). So, what are some of the unique funding issues currently facing women's organisations?

### **Gender not on the agenda**

Increasingly, women's organisations are reporting that gender equality and women's issues have disappeared off the political agenda. Many of the interviewees believed that there exists a widely held view that women and men are equal, despite the persistent and overwhelming evidence to the contrary, and that sex equality in general receives less attention and funding than some of the other equality strands, for example the Equal Opportunities Commission receives less funding than any of the other equalities commissions. Tackling discrimination against women is no longer a priority because the battle for women's equality is perceived to be won.

"I think the assumption is [...] that we have achieved [women's] equality, that there isn't much to do, but in fact there is still a lot more to do." (Asian Women's Resource Centre)

*"Women? You've got equality now haven't you?"*

*"Women? You've got equality now haven't you?" even though all the statistics show that we haven't at all. There is that kind of climate that '[women are] not very interesting'. I think this move towards generic equalities has done gender a disservice...when people talk about inequalities, they are almost always thinking about BME-type issues and then [disability] since the Disability Discrimination Act. But they don't think gender. [...] I don't think we're seen as a disadvantaged group by most people." (Women's Design Service)*

"Women-only organisations are not seen as necessary anymore. There is some sort of blindness going on in society; a lot of people don't see the need for a women-only centre. [...] I don't know why that is because I know the abuse of women and girls is much worse now. I don't think it's just that women are reporting it more, I think women are being abused in a lot of ways and people cast a blind eye or think she must have done something to deserve it." (Women's Alcohol Centre)

The view that men and women have equality is not only inaccurate but has significant impacts on both the lives of women, and the organisations who deliver services to them (who are not considered to be a priority). The rape and sexual assault field is a particularly good example of this, despite the overwhelming evidence that rape and sexual assault is widespread, that it is gendered in nature (overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women) and can have significant and life-long affects on survivors:

"The truth is that if we were only trying to get money to work with adult women survivors [of rape, sexual assault and incest] we would be really, really struggling. Generally, the work we are able to do with the women comes out of the [funding from the] work we do with children and young people. [...] I think if we stopped working with young people we would struggle even more, as trying to get funding just to work with women has proved to be very difficult." (Colchester Rape Crisis Line)

"[London] Rape Crisis Centre had to close because they couldn't get funding. We see the figures for rape going up year-on-year and we see the convictions figures on rape going down year-on-year. What does that tell any of us about governmental priorities when it comes to essential services for women victims of anything?" (Tower Hamlets Women's Aid)

If 'women' can be ignored in an area like rape and sexual assault, and rape and sexual assault itself can be easily overlooked, the implications for 'women' generally are deeply worrying.

*the withdrawal of SERICC's services would result in an increased workload for GPs and that women and girls had no other service*

Since 1984, South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre (SERICC) have provided a confidential, independent and specialist women-only sexual violence service. SERICC's funding (approximately £60,000) was cut by the health authority in the mid 1990s because health services were under pressure to make efficiency savings. The commissioner of voluntary services also considered SERICC's funding unfair because there was considered to be "no equity of service provision for men". The organisation narrowly escaped closure of its counselling service because a "forward-thinking individual in a PCT filled the funding gap" who recognised that the withdrawal of SERICC's services would result in an increased workload for GPs and that women and girls had no other service (Women's Resource Centre, 2005).

Political will (i.e. political commitment) was one of the key features of the GLC Women's Committee and this translated into funding of not only services for women and campaigning but also to women's organisations.

Participants in the research talked about the role of generic organisations delivering services to women and the impact this has had on funding to the women's sector:

"I think that it's the nature of mainstreaming that has meant that organisations like ourselves and other women's sector organisations, have increasingly found it more

difficult to attract funding. I think it's possibly more difficult because there aren't any funders, apart from the ALG, who are committed to funding the women's sector."

(Anonymous)

One organisation also spoke about homophobia, an additional discrimination, in trying to access funding for services for lesbians, even from funders who are sympathetic to women's issues:

"We don't have any specific funding. We haven't been able to look beyond three months of sustainability in the last four years and that's because, despite a large number of grant [applications] being submitted, we don't get the high rewards. [...] There are institutional barriers and institutional homophobia that prevents us from accessing funds. When we've gone to the few women's funders that remain, we haven't had a positive reception in relation to the lesbian side of the work." (Women's Voice/Kairos in Soho)

### **Policy is failing women and is impacting on funding**

There is a clear link in this study between policy decisions and their impact on funding. Women's organisations identified both the importance of women's sector representation on decision making bodies (such as Local Strategic Partnerships and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships) and of consistent engagement with government to influence its public policy decisions.

One of the most visible issues that women's organisations work with is domestic violence. The sustained lobbying and campaigning undertaken by women's organisations over the last three decades has significantly influenced the number, range and funding of services (both residential and community).

"Domestic violence is much higher up on the agenda and people are listening a lot more, but organisations like ours and other women's organisations have been going on about these issues for years, and it's only now that it's actually coming to the forefront and money is being pumped into it." (Asian Women's Resource Centre)

"

However, even within the relatively well resourced field of domestic violence, government policy is failing to adequately meet highly vulnerable women's needs. In particular, participants raised the issue of women with no recourse to public funds.

*They represent some of the most severely abused women because they are so vulnerable"*

"We are increasingly having referrals from women who haven't got secure immigration status so they can't claim benefits and that means they can't claim Housing Benefit to pay their rent when they come to the refuge. They represent some of the most severely abused women because they are so vulnerable. Most women's refuges will take them on and worry about how they're going to fund them once they are in." (Eaves Housing for Women)

The failure of government policy to address women with no recourse is impacting significantly on the finances of women's refuges:

"Some refuges do take women with 'no recourse' but they are unable to recover the rental money through housing benefit. One small scale survey identified that through the unclaimed monies accrued refuges lost total revenue of £147,000. Many individual refuges carry 'bad debts' and are penalised by their Registered Social landlords as a result." (Butler, 2002)

As illustrated earlier, organisations working in the sexual violence field increasingly have to access funding through other policy areas which increases the vulnerability of their services because the link between their area of work and the policy area under which they are being funded can be tenuous.

*"The government aren't aware of the limitations that they've set within crime and disorder partnerships to enable women's groups to access funding – this whole area hasn't been thought through properly."*

"...sexual violence isn't a priority. I don't think I've seen it list anywhere as a target in years. Sometimes we will scrape through on crime agenda under 'violent crime', but you know, adult women survivors, child sexual abuse – no chance, this area of need is no one's target. At the moment we could try and access funding from drug and alcohol services for a sexual violence counsellor who works on drugs and alcohol issues with the individual women. The education service said they'd fund a young women's counsellor as long as counselling improves young women's attendance and attainment at school. Until sexual violence and women become a [policy] target, we will never easily meet the criteria. The government aren't aware of the limitations that they've set within crime and disorder partnerships to enable women's groups to access funding – this whole area hasn't been thought through properly." (South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre)

Many women's organisations are not aware of or do not have the capacity to engage with formal decision making and/or representative bodies such as Local Strategic Partnerships, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, Community Empowerment Networks, ChangeUp hubs etc. The knock-on effect of this can be significant: the lack of gender analysis is widespread in government policy; policies are designed to be gender neutral in an attempt to provide a one-size-fits-all policy; policies do not identify and/or meet the needs of women; and services to meet the needs of women are overlooked, not identified or not implemented.

"...our representatives on the LSP [Local Strategic Partnership] don't understand women's issues, so they wouldn't know to raise them in the first place." (South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre)

"...because the structures for funding that are coming in are regional, it doesn't fit with how we work and it doesn't really fit with what women offenders need. When services are being commissioned, commissioners are going to be looking at services that can cover their region and those will inevitably end up being generic services, not services for women specifically. They won't necessarily have the expertise in dealing with the issues of women offenders which are really quite different. It's a strange time for us and other organisations working in the criminal justice system – there are huge changes in the structures around us and we're not sure how we're going to fit into it. We're worried about how the needs of women offenders are going to be taken into account. In the structure of the National Offender Management Service there is no senior champion of the needs of women offenders so there's a danger of good policy being lost." (Women in Prison)

### **Lack of recognition and awareness**

Many of the research participants felt that women's organisations are routinely overlooked and marginalised *because* they are women's organisations. The women's voluntary and community sector is evidence poor – very little research exists about the state of the women's voluntary sector – which serves to further exacerbate the invisibility of women's organisations.

"What's happening more and more is that there's a lack of recognition of the value of the work of the women's sector. I think there are still some statutory organisations that feel that we are not as important and we haven't got much to offer, so there is that constant battle for the women's sector to gain recognition....that we make a valuable contribution to the lives of women." (Asian Women's Resource Centre)

*"whatever we do or try to put forward, it's initially judged by the fact that it's a women's organisation, so already people make assumptions"*

"...sometimes we can't help but think that we are not taken seriously.....The feeling is that we're not taken seriously as people who can run organisations, as directors of organisations or even board members of organisations, so that whatever we do or try to put forward, it's initially judged by the fact that it's a women's organisation, so already people make assumptions - they've got their own way of measuring the standards of women's organisations and that in itself leads to being discriminated against when it comes to accessing big pots of funding." (Zimbabwe Women's Network)

It is not uncommon that policy decision makers and influencers (including voluntary and community organisations) do not know what women's organisations do, why they are needed, where they are located or indeed that such a thing as the women's voluntary and community sector exists. The consequence of this is that the women's sector is overlooked as an important stakeholder. Whilst this is less likely in areas where women's organisations are strongly represented (such as violence against women), this is common in voluntary and community sector policy.

Those women's organisations who work in areas not traditionally considered women's issues face further questioning about why they need to exist, the assumption being that men and women will face the same problems and experience the same outcomes, despite evidence to the contrary.

"As a women's organisation, we kind of fall through a gap [...] we fall outside the 'normal' definition, the mainstream definition, of what women's organisations should be doing. We also lose out as an environmental organisation, because we're a women's organisation. We're seen as too specialist, too separatist, too small, whatever, so we kind of lose out." (Women's Environmental Network)

### **Summary**

Participants in this research gave a range of examples of the funding threats and barriers that their organisations face. Many of these problems are shared across the voluntary and community sector and are well known to funders and voluntary organisations alike.

However, this research showed that women's organisations are experiencing specific struggles, namely that: gender is no longer on the political agenda; government policy is failing to meet women's needs (and therefore affects the types of services that are funded); and decision makers and influencers pay little heed to the women's voluntary and community sector. Pressure from the Women's Liberation Movement brought about important public policy developments for women and also gave birth to the women's voluntary and community sector because it was recognised that positive change also required 'grassroots' services and advocacy. Yet, this legacy is being undermined as women's organisations struggle to survive in a rapidly changing funding environment.

Whilst this report has focused on government funding to the sector, we acknowledge the importance, and need for further investigation, of grant giving by charitable trusts and donations from the public.

# Conclusion and recommendations

This study was carried out to explore the question of "why women?"

Why are women's organisations needed and what do they do?

Using official statistics and other research we provided a snapshot of some of the main forms of disadvantage and discrimination facing women, from the gender pay gap and violence against women, to institutional sexism in social systems such as the prison system and mental health service. We illustrated the effects of these problems on women's lives with data from interviews carried out with 44 women's organisations and projects for this study. This showed the complex nature of problems such as multiple oppression; the long-term consequences of childhood sexual abuse; and the way poverty and economic dependency is related to violence against women.

Next we looked at the solutions women's organisations offer to these problems, and explored the impact of these organisations on individual women, on their families and communities, and on wider society. The impact of women's organisations includes:

- Improved mental health.
- More women in employment.
- Fewer children 'looked after' by Social Services.
- Protection from violence and loss of life.
- Increased volunteering and active citizenship.
- Fairer criminal justice system and better protection for victims of crime.

We have described how women's organisations achieve these changes to women's lives and society, and found that the key features of women's organisations that make them effective include the provision of women-only space, focus on empowerment and a high level of self-help and service user involvement. These features of their work form the 'added value' of the women's voluntary and community sector. Women's organisations often work at 'grass roots' level with the most marginalised people in society and are usually established because a need is identified where mainstream services are inappropriate or non-existent. They have proved to be powerful agents for social change – adding considerable value to the government's equalities agenda by reaching women and their families otherwise inaccessible to government agencies or who have fallen through the 'safety net'. Women's organisations

However, the unique contribution of women's organisations to the welfare of society is under threat. The interviews in this study indicated serious and worsening funding problems for the women's voluntary and community sector. Some of these problems are in common with other community groups, such as short-term insecure funding and the failure to implement full cost recovery. But other barriers holding women's organisations back from achieving their full potential are unique to this sector. Interviewees reported a lack of political will for the work they are seeking to achieve because of the myth that

women's inequality is no longer a problem. In addition, they believed they are not taken seriously because they are women's organisations.

The women's voluntary and community sector is a powerful agent of social change. It provides high quality services to, and 'voice' and advocacy on behalf of, some of the most forgotten and isolated women in our communities. Women's organisations keep women safe and empower them to transform their lives. Because of its expertise and commitment to women's equality, the women's sector is able to challenge institutional discrimination and provide advice and information to inform effective public policy.

Women's organisations are an integral part of the voluntary and community sector and work closely with other organisations to ensure that women, children and men have access to equal opportunities. They develop infrastructure in local communities through providing community facilities. The women's sector builds and sustains regenerated, safer, stronger and more cohesive communities for people to work and live in.

The government must ensure gender is firmly reinstated on the political agenda. It must acknowledge the systematic disadvantage women face because of their gender and publicly recognise the essential services and expertise the women's sector provides to address this.

## Recommendations

We call upon the government to implement the following:

- The Home Office should develop a cross-departmental strategy on sustaining the women's sector. This should include:
  - A commitment to adequately resource the women's sector engagement with government.
  - A women's sector funding needs analysis, with particular attention to women's organisations led by and for: lesbian, bisexual and transgender; black and minority ethnic; disabled; younger and older women; women's faith and other marginalised women's organisations.
  - Research to measure the economic impact of the women's sector.
  - A commitment to invest in women's organisations through retaining grant giving, not just 'buying' services from them.
- The Treasury should carry out regular gender and other equalities analyses of spending on the voluntary and community sector, including the Invest to Save, *futurebuilders*, and Capacity Builders programmes.
- The Treasury should explicitly address funding for women's organisations, and other equalities organisations, in its forthcoming revised guidance on financial relationships with the 'third sector.'
- The Home Office, Office of Government Commerce and Equal Opportunities Commission should produce guidance to help public bodies ensure that procurement and other funding for the voluntary sector does not unfairly exclude women's organisations and other marginalised groups.
- The Home Office and Compact Working Group should jointly assess how well the Compact and Compact Plus meet the needs of women's organisations.
- The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Local Government Association should provide guidance to local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships on working with the women's sector and other equalities groups.

- Local authorities should carry out regular gender and other equalities analyses of local funding for the voluntary and community sector.
- Local Strategic Partnerships should ensure that women's organisations are actively involved in developing their local Sustainable Community Strategy and the priorities for their local area.
- The National Audit Office should undertake a second audit of the relationship between public bodies and the voluntary and community sector, with particular attention to women's; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender; age-based; black and minority ethnic; faith; and disability-led organisations.
- The Women and Equality Unit, Equal Opportunities Commission and Commission for Equality and Human Rights should state publicly and explicitly that the Gender Equality Duty requires public bodies to consult with women's organisations as stakeholders and experts in promoting gender equality.
- The Commission on Equality and Human Rights should provide guidance to public bodies on working with women's; disability-led; age-based; black and minority ethnic; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender; and faith organisations.
- The Commission on Equality and Human Rights should have equitable ringfenced funding for gender equality, as well as ringfenced funding for all other equalities groups.
- Government funders should collect and analyse gender and other equalities disaggregated data on service users, volunteers and employees from the voluntary and community organisations they fund.
- Funders should name 'women' as a priority group in funding criteria when targeting equalities groups and in needs assessments.
- Funders should ensure that they value and fund advocacy, campaigning and policy work.
- Public bodies should conduct gender and other equalities impact assessments of proposed changes to funding policy, to assess how they affect the women's sector and other equalities groups.
- Public bodies should improve their expertise on gender equality and deliver gender training to all staff.
- Public bodies should conduct gender impact assessments (disaggregated data) on public services, employment and policy. Race, disability, sexuality, age, religion and income impact assessments should also be carried out and all statistics disaggregated by gender.
- The inspectorate bodies (such as the National Audit Office, Audit Commission and Ofsted) should meet their requirements under the forthcoming Gender Equality Duty by ensuring all auditing of public bodies includes equalities disaggregated data and gender impact assessments.
- The government should set and achieve a new date by which all statutory funders should adopt Full Cost Recovery as a standard model [since April 2006 target has not been met].
- The government should develop, fund and implement a cross-departmental, national Gender Equality Strategy and a national Violence Against Women Strategy.
- The Home Office should either repeal the 'no recourse to public funds' rule or provide adequate funding to cover the costs to women's refuges and individual women created by the rule.
- The government should safeguard the provision of single-sex services in the voluntary sector by clarifying the current inconsistencies between the Sex Discrimination Act, European regulations and the Equality Bill.

# Appendix 1

## List of organisations interviewed

Anonymous

Asian Women's Resource Centre

Bangladeshi Women's Society

Barking and Dagenham's Women's Aid (Eaves Housing for Women)

Black Women's Mental Health Project

Women's Committee, British Council of Disabled People

Bengali Women's Group Forum (at Consortium of Bengali Associations)

Brent Women's Aid

Camden Women's Aid

Colchester Rape Crisis Line

Creative and Support Trust

Dress for Success

Elevate

Gemma

GFS Platform

Greater London Domestic Violence Project

Haringey Women's Forum

Hillcroft College

Hillingdon Women's Centre

Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation

Kalayaan

Kiran Asian Women's Aid

Latin American Women's Aid

Latin American Women's Rights Service

Mamas and Babies

Middle East Centre for Women's Rights

Older Feminists' Network

Positively Women

Powerhouse

Refugee Women's Resource Project (at Asylum Aid)

Rights of Women

Somali Women's Health Project

South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre

South Yorkshire Women's Development Trust

Tower Hamlets Women's Aid

Winner Project (at Preston Road Women's Centre)

women@thewell

Women and Manual Trades

Women's Alcohol Centre (at Alcohol Recovery Project)

Women's Design Service

Women's Environmental Network

Women's Voice (at Kairos in Soho)

Women in Prison

Zimbabwe Women's Network

# Appendix 2

## Interview script and questions

Hello, can I speak to [name of director] please? My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm calling from Women's Resource Centre. We're doing some research on the value of women's organisations, and I was wondering if I could interview you for the research? It will take around half an hour to an hour and the questions will be about your organisation and the problems in society that your work addresses. When would be a good time to do the interview?

### Interview

First of all I'll give you some more information about the project. It's being carried out by Women's Resource Centre, [and we're an umbrella body for women's organisations in London]. The research project is part of our campaign called "why women?". We will use information from the research in a report due to be completed in March 2006, and in other reports and submissions to government related to the campaign. We would like to use quotations from this interview in the report, and do a case study of your organisation. Is that ok? Are you happy for us to use the name of your organisation in our report?

If you would like to stop the interview at any time, or if you would like to keep any part confidential, then please let me know, and I won't write down that part.

I would like to record this interview on tape, to help me write it up accurately, is that ok with you? We'll only use the tape to write up the interview for the report, and then we'll delete the recording. Ok?

[START RECORDING]

Can I just confirm that you're happy to take part in this interview that will be part of our research for the '**why women?**' campaign that I just explained about? And that you're happy for us to name your organisation in the report? Do you have any questions before we begin?

Please feel free to stop at any point or ask questions, or add something that you want to say. Ok?

I'll start with a few brief details about your organisation, then ask you some questions about the work you do.

*About your organisation:*

1. Name of interviewee:
2. Name of organisation/project:
3. What is your position within the organisation?
4. When was your organisation/project set up?
5. Is your organisation/project non-profit making? [NB stop interview if not]
6. Does your organisation/project aim to improve the status or situation of women? [NB stop interview if not]
7. How many staff do you have?
8. And volunteers?

9. Annual income?

Not funded	< £10,000	£10,001 – 50,000	£50,001 – 100,000
£100,001 – 200,000	£200,001 – 300,000	£300,001 – 400,000	£400,001+

10. What are the main activities of your organisation/project?

Prompt: Is your organisation led by women/or are you a women's project in a larger organisation?

*Work of the organisation:*

11. Can you tell me a bit about who uses your services (or who your organisation is for)?

Prompt: What is going on in their lives that make them come to your organisation/project?

12. What problem or problems does your organisation/project work to address?

13. How does this problem affect women differently from men?

Prompt: Can you tell me more about why your organisation/project focuses on women?

14. What services does your organisation offer?

Prompt: Can you describe the way you work with your service users?

Prompt: What happens when women make contact with your organisation?

If a campaigning organisation (no services): What campaigning work do you do?

15. Do you know approximately how many service users you have per year?

16. Can you tell me anything about the long-term impact of your organisation [e.g. on your service users]?

Prompt if necessary: can you tell me more about your organisation's role in that?

17. Can you think of any particular examples of a woman who has benefited from coming to your organisation?

[OR FOR CAMPAIGN GROUP: Can you think of any particular examples of an achievement of your organisation or influence you have had?]

18. Do you employ male staff or volunteers? Why/why not?

19. Is your project led by women? If yes: How do you think your organisation would be different if it was not run by women?

Prompt: How would your service users respond?

Prompt: How would it affect the type of issues you work on?

20. Do you have a women-only space or service? Why/why not?

21. In general, what is your view of women-only spaces?

Prompt: Why is that?

*Influencing government:*

Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about your organisation's relationship with government, and then about funding issues.

22. Do you feel your organisation influences the attitudes and policies of government (either local or national)?

Prompt if yes, how? What has been the result of that?

Prompt if no, why not?

23. What barriers, if any, do you think your organisation faces in influencing government?

24. If there are barriers: Do you think it would be any easier if you were not a women's organisation? If yes, how?

25. What would enable you to have more influence at local or national level?

*Funding:*

26. Does your organisation face any problems with funding?

Prompt if yes: can you describe the kinds of problems?

27. If yes: Do you think funding would be any easier if you were not a women's organisation? If yes, how?

28. If yes: Is there anything that would help you with these funding problems?

[NB Tell interviewee about WRC development support if appropriate. Development support: WRC offers a tailor-made one-to-one consultancy service providing funding advice, as well as help with strategic planning; business planning; policies; evaluation systems and management committee development. We also run training in these areas]

*Wrap-up:*

So we're coming towards the end of the questions now...

29. Thinking more generally, do you think men and women are equal in the UK?

30. If no, do you think women face disadvantage or inequality? In what ways?

31. For you personally, why did you choose to work in a women's organisation/project?

And just a couple of final questions:

32. Do you have any evaluation reports you could share with us?

[For example we'd be particularly interested in anything that looks at service users' views of women-only space or services. Have you done any evaluations with your service users that you could share with us?]

If yes ask them to send them in.

33. Can you suggest any other women's organisations that you think may be interested in participating in this research?

34. Finally, is there anything else you would like to add?

**Thank you very much for your time and your help with this research.**

Would you like us to send you a copy of the report? (take email address if possible)

Would you like us to send you updates on our why women? campaign?

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