



# **The why women? campaign**

## **An anthology of the why women? resources**

July 2011

Understanding and supporting  
women and their organisations

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# About the Women's Resource Centre

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) is a unique charity which supports women's organisations to be more effective and sustainable. We provide training, information, resources and one-to-one support on a range of organisational development issues. We also lobby decision-makers on behalf of the women's not-for-profit sector for improved representation and funding.

Our members work in a wide range of fields including health, violence against women, employment, education, rights and equality, the criminal justice system and the environment. They deliver services to and campaign on behalf of some of the most marginalised communities of women.

There are over ten thousand people working or volunteering for our members who support almost half a million individuals each year.

For more information about this report, contact:

Policy Team  
Women's Resource Centre  
Ground Floor East  
33-41 Dallington Street  
London EC1V 0BB  
Email: [policy@wrc.org.uk](mailto:policy@wrc.org.uk)  
Tel: 020 7324 3030  
[www.wrc.org.uk](http://www.wrc.org.uk)  
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Edited by Tania Pouwhare.

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- Nottingham Women's Centre
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- Watford Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre
- West Cumbria Rape Crisis
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# Foreword

*"I don't think I could put into words how valuable and necessary this campaign is. For anyone who has ever suffered or seen first hand the effects of abuse, rape, domestic violence and poverty they would surely never dare to question the validity of these services, and very often the courage of the women that provide them. This campaign needs all our support if we ever wish to challenge the status quo that sees women's organisations undervalued and women's opinions in general ignored."*  
(**why women?** campaign supporter)

In March 2006 the Women's Resource Centre launched the **why women?** campaign – a programme of research, publications, resources and lobbying highlighting the historical and current contributions of the women's voluntary and community sector (VCS) in service provision, policy and legislative developments and in changing public attitudes.

This report brings together the executive summaries of the **why women?** reports - key statistics, case studies and other data from the last four years that women's voluntary and community organisations (VCOs), the third sector generally and decision-makers need to know. The full reports can be downloaded from [www.wrc.org.uk/whywomen](http://www.wrc.org.uk/whywomen).

Women's organisations improve the quality of women's lives, promote equality and challenge discrimination, and are responsible for immeasurable, positive outcomes for communities. However, despite the ongoing need for women's organisations, the women's sector is facing serious threats to its sustainability and securing adequate investment is an ongoing challenge. These challenges have been elevated as drastic cuts in public spending begin to take their toll.

The objectives of the campaign were to:

1. Raise awareness of the women's VCS, its origins, what it does and its impact;
2. Develop the evidence base on the value of the women's sector;
3. Improve awareness of the need for focused funding and investment in the women's sector;
4. Improve awareness of the need to actively engage with the women's sector; and
5. Increase knowledge of the issues adversely impacting on the women's VCS and the solutions required.

The campaign has highlighted the need for investment in women's organisations so they can continue their vital, and often life saving, activities. Unfortunately, some women's organisations have closed since the launch of the campaign, some of whom are noted in the Acknowledgements page of this report. We are deeply concerned that these organisations closed not because they weren't needed, but

because of lack of investment in women's organisations and the low priority afforded to women's equality.

The vast majority of women's organisations are locally based and locally funded. The Government's drive towards greater localism together with cuts in public spending is leaving women's organisations in extremely vulnerable positions. At a time when women's organisations are most needed and are reporting a surge in demand, it is estimated that charities will lose up to £4.5bn due to public spending cuts.<sup>1</sup> Many local authorities have already cut more than 25% in voluntary and community support for 2012.<sup>2</sup>

Our research shows that one in five women's organisations have closed in recent years and many more face an uncertain future.<sup>3</sup> We currently have a list of 69 organisations that have lost funding in recent months.

The impact on women and children will be significant. For example, 60% of domestic violence refuge services and 72% of outreach services did not have any funding agreed as of 1 April 2011 – 70,000 of the most vulnerable women in our communities were at risk of losing (life-saving) services.

Our recent survey of 91 women's organisations found that 64% of women's organisations are 'very concerned' about funding this year and 95% face funding cuts. Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women's organisations reported being particularly affected. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGB&T) organisations and those working with women on low incomes are also being badly affected.

We have over 2,000 supporters of the campaign and have made a number of achievements – the North East Women's Network launched their own **why women?** campaign, we have successfully highlighted the challenges to women-only services, provided much needed evidence for the sector and helped Rape Crisis (England and Wales) secure funding for Rape Crisis centres. However, we still have much work to do to secure the financial sustainability of the women's sector in an increasingly difficult funding environment. That's why we will continue to call on the Government and others to put 'gender back on the agenda' by:

- Acknowledging the systematic disadvantage women face *because* of their gender; and
- Publicly recognising and adequately funding the essential services and expertise the women's sector provides to address this.

Our **why women?** campaign affects everyone because stopping discrimination, inequality and violence against women benefits us all. But to achieve this we need strong women's organisations so they can continue to provide effective solutions to complex social and economic problems.

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, Allison (2010) *Spending review: questions over charities and the 'big society'*. The Guardian.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/oct/20/charities-and-spending-review>

<sup>2</sup> National Council of Voluntary Organisations (2011) *Charity leaders' confidence levels hit rock bottom*. NCVO.

<http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/news/members/charity-leaders-confidence-levels-hit-rock-bottom>

<sup>3</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2009) *Not just bread, but roses, too*. WRC.

[http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2010/b/bread\\_an\\_roses.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2010/b/bread_an_roses.pdf)

To find out more visit [www.wrc.org.uk/whywomen](http://www.wrc.org.uk/whywomen). There you can download the **why women?** reports and order our free campaign resources such as posters, postcards and our very own **why women?** short film. Become a member of WRC, follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/whywomen](http://www.twitter.com/whywomen), or become a fan of our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/whywomen](http://www.facebook.com/whywomen).

Together we can ensure a strong and diverse women's sector for the future.

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'Vivienne Hayes', is positioned above the printed name.

Vivienne Hayes  
Chief Executive  
Women's Resource Centre

## Key messages

Over the last two centuries there have been many advances in the rights and equality of women and girls. However, there is still much to do. Women's organisations are vital partners to government in furthering gender equality and must be seen as such.

We welcome government initiatives to address the sustainability of the sector, such as government funding to support Rape Crisis centres and the Department of Health (funding the Women's Health and Equality Consortium to build its partnership to apply for strategic partner funding). However, until the value of women's organisations is fully realised, more of these initiatives and temporary special measures are needed.<sup>4</sup> There is a pressing need for greater understanding of, and engagement with, women's organisations at local, regional and central government levels, particularly amongst commissioners.

### Embedded in women's equality

Apart from a number of long-established women's organisations, such as the YWCA, Girlguiding UK, Fawcett Society and National Federation of Women's Institutes, the women's sector, as we know it today, has directly emerged from the Women's Liberation Movement and second wave feminism. Women's organising has been responsible for many of the rights women (and men) enjoy today. Promoting women's equality is still an important role played by the women's sector, along with providing practical support to individual women and their families.

### The bedrock of safer and stronger communities

Women's organisations provide a wide and varied range of activities from: providing vital, and often life saving, front-line services; to capacity building of other voluntary and community organisations; to policy and campaigning. They deliver services to and campaign on behalf of some of the most marginalised communities of women.

Women's VCOs work across all fields including health, violence against women, employment, education, rights and equality, the criminal justice system and the environment.

*Not just bread, but roses, too* (2009) found that 26% of women's organisations (across England) worked in the violence against women (VAW) field, three quarters of which worked in domestic violence. The East Midlands had the highest proportion of organisations working in VAW (37%). London had the highest number of organisations working in VAW, yet these organisations represented only 13% of organisations in the region. One in five organisations (22%) were categorised as

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<sup>4</sup> 'Temporary special measures' are affirmative actions such as quotas and positive discrimination that are designed to accelerate women's equality and rights and facilitate the equality of women as a group (e.g. all-women short lists for selecting political party candidates to increase the number of women in parliament). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women mandates and compels signatories to the Convention, such as the UK, to implement temporary special measures in order to effect the structural, social and cultural changes necessary to correct past and current forms and effects of discrimination against women.

providing general services to women (i.e. covered a range of areas, such as women's centres); 17% of organisations focused on education, employment and training; and 14% of organisations worked in the health field.

A third of organisations (225) studied in our 2009 research were based in London. This was significantly higher than for all general charities (16% of general charities were based in London). This was followed by:

North West	90 organisations
Yorkshire and the Humber	87 organisations
South East	75 organisations
East of England	66 organisations
West Midlands	64 organisations
East Midlands	56 organisations
South West	49 organisations

The North East had the least number of organisations - only five per cent of all organisations mapped were based in this region (56 organisations).

## **We still need 'women-only'**

The provision of women-only spaces and services is a characteristic of the sector not mainstreamed in other sectors.

Safety, both physical and emotional, is a key benefit of women-only services. As a result, women feel supported and comfortable. They become empowered and develop confidence, greater independence and higher self-esteem. They are less marginalised and isolated and feel more able to express themselves. Women using these services feel that their voices are heard and listened to. Through sharing their experiences with other women to make sense of the world together, they develop a sense of solidarity. Participants often described women-only services as a sanctuary.

Our *why women-only?* (2007) research found that women from all walks of life prefer to use women-only services within a range of different contexts. Some women in the research stated they would not go to mixed services, and their needs would not be met at all if women-only services did not exist.

Our random poll of 1,000 women from the public found that:

- Ninety-seven per cent stated that a woman should have the choice of accessing a women-only support service if they had been the victim of a sexual assault.
- Of the 560 women that would choose a women-only gym, they cited reasons such as feeling more comfortable, less self-conscious and less intimidated. Respondents stated that they didn't want men watching them, looking at their bodies or sexually harassing them.

- Ninety per cent of women polled believed it was important to have the right to report sexual or domestic violence to a woman (such as a woman Police officer); 87% thought it was important to be able to see a female health professional about sexual or reproductive health matters; and 78% thought it was important to have the choice of a woman professional for counselling and personal support needs.

Creative and Supportive Trust (CAST), an organisation which works with women ex/offenders and those at risk of offending, found that 80% of their service users interviewed expressed that it was 'very important' that CAST was women-only. Nearly half (44%) of the students said they would not attend if CAST had not been a women-only space. CAST's survey also found that 64% of users would prefer women-only services in areas such as group counselling, hospital wards, mental health services, housing associations, health clinics, parenting classes and counselling.

Many women have a personal preference for women-only services and, given the choice, will choose single-sex services over those which are mixed.

However, in our *why women-only?* (2007) survey of women's organisations, 70% of respondents felt that being a women-only organisation made it harder to access funding, while just 3% felt that it made it easier. Forty-three per cent of centres surveyed in our research *The Crisis in Rape Crisis* (2008) had been challenged by funders about being women-only.

It is also worth noting that women- and girl-only services are *not* unlawful. The Equality Act (2010) enables public bodies to deliver (or fund) single-sex services or take other positive actions in order to address disadvantage and inequality as well as for issues of decency and modesty.

## **Self-determination is crucial**

Some groups of women experience greater marginalisation and isolation and have particular experiences as a result of being both female and dealing with the impacts of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, disabilism, class, poverty, health status etc. (often referred to as intersectional discrimination).

Organisations which are led by and for minority women are essential in addressing prejudice and discrimination and furthering women's rights. Their existence strengthens the women's VCS. For example, BAME women's organisations have been primarily responsible for bringing the plight of women and girls who are subjected to forced marriage, female genital mutilation, inhumane immigration rules, so-called 'honour' killings etc. to the attention of government, the third sector and the public in general. As a result, many important legislative changes have been made. All women, therefore, benefit from these advances in rights and protection.

*Not just bread, but roses, too* (2009) found that only 1% of all women's organisations studied focused on lesbian, bisexual and trans women. Over half (53%) had a focus on girls and young women, 27% of organisations had services specifically for older women and 22% for disabled women. One in ten organisations had targeted

services for women from particular religions or faith groups and only 4% of organisations focussed on refugee and asylum seeking women.

On average across all English regions, one in three organisations focused on BAME women but this rose to half all organisations in London and 37% in the West Midlands.

## **Enduring positive differences to women's lives**

Women's organisations have a focus on empowerment and independence and there are high levels of service user involvement and peer support. Almost half of all organisations interviewed in *why women?* (2006) referred to empowerment of the women they work with. Empowerment was often described as the process whereby women become able to advocate for themselves.

Interviewees in our research (including service users) gave numerous examples of how women's lives have been transformed by the work of women's organisations. Impacts included women playing more active roles in their communities, savings to the state, long-term freedom from violence, improved mental health, and economic independence through training and employment.

Because of the ways women's organisations work (providing women-only space, strong connections between service users and staff, needs-based services) they can successfully engage with women that are not accessing other services.

Historically, women's organisations have made significant 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. Women's organisations continue to advocate on behalf of women and achieve important changes to policy and practice.

## **The many challenges to sustainability**

Our research has 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. However, securing sustainable funding was consistently identified as a major challenge for women's organisations.

### **Securing sustainable funding**

In 2002/03, only 1.2% of central Government funding to the VCS in the UK went to women's organisations despite making up 7% of registered charities.

In 2006, WRC conducted a snapshot audit of 26 different central Government funding streams. The research found that, along with lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGB&T) organisations, the women's sector received less funding than any other equalities groups in the funding stakes. We were also concerned to find that there was a difference in favour of generic organisations delivering projects to women over women's organisations.

In our *Not just bread, but roses, too* (2009) research, one in five organisations studied had no financial data for any of the three years examined and, therefore, there is a high likelihood that these organisations had closed. In 1984 there were 68 Rape Crisis centres in England and Wales, but at the time of conducting the research for *The Crisis in Rape Crisis* (2008), there were just 38 centres affiliated to the umbrella body Rape Crisis (England and Wales). Nine Rape Crisis centres had closed in the last five years.

The mean income of the organisations in *Not just bread, but roses, too* (2009) in 2006-07 was £128,835.

Of those organisations with three years of consecutive financial data, over half (51%) of organisations were located in the £100,000 - £1 million income band. However, the vast majority of these organisations had an income of less than £500,000. Organisations with income of £1 million or more made up 6% of all organisations but accounted for half of all income. This is consistent with charities in general.

The total income of organisations (with consecutive financial data) increased by approximately 8% each year. When inflation was factored in however, the increase was 5.5%, which was lower than the overall real increase of 9.4% for general registered charities in the UK. In real terms, total incomes in the North West and South East decreased year-on-year. The largest increases in income were in London and the East of England.

Expenditure increased at a higher rate than increases in income. Subsequently the gap between income and expenditure narrowed particularly in the North West, London and the East of England. The difference between overall income and expenditure narrowed. In 2004/05 there was an overall surplus of 8% but by 2006/07 this had narrowed to 3%.

Organisations with an income of £10,000-100,000 were most likely to experience high income volatility – i.e. yearly increases followed by decreases in income (or vice versa) of 20% or more (27%). This was significantly higher than charities in general (17%). Of all organisations with an income of £100,000 or less, organisations in the North East were most likely to experience high income volatility.

The median income of Rape Crisis centres in *The Crisis in Rape Crisis* (2008) research was £81,598 (2006-07), only marginally more than the cost, to the state, of one rape. Funding to some of the larger Sexual Assault Referral Centres is five times this amount. Sixty-three per cent of centres had an annual income of £100,000 or less. The average incomes of Rape Crisis centres in the North West, South East and East of England were significantly lower than in other English regions and the centre in North Wales.

The grant funding received by Rape Crisis centres in 2006-07 was examined in-depth. There were 161 grants reported, ranging in value from £200 to £202,000 and the average grant was just £8,650. Given the low value of the average grant funding received, it was not surprising that Rape Crisis centres submitted a disproportionate number of applications compared with the funding received. For example, one organisation received just £77,000 (in total) from 14 funders.

Only 21% of services delivered by Rape Crisis centres were fully-funded. Seventy-nine per cent of grants were for one year or less. Securing funding was a relentless and constant challenge; often resulting in low staff morale and/or, in worst case scenarios, the 'freezing' or closure of services (resulting in survivors not receiving the support they needed).

### **Local government funding is crucial**

The vast majority of women's organisations are locally based and locally funded. The Government's drive towards greater localism together with cuts in public spending is leaving women's organisations in extremely vulnerable positions. At a time when women's organisations are most needed and are reporting a surge in demand, it is estimated that charities will lose up to £4.5bn due to public spending cuts.<sup>5</sup> Many local authorities have already cut more than 25% in voluntary and community support for 2012.<sup>6</sup>

In 2008-09, 32% percent of funding reported by Rape Crisis centres came from councils and associated partnerships (such as Local Strategic Partnerships), 26% from the Home Office and 23% from charitable grant givers. However, where the funding came from did not reflect where centres were applying to. For example, over half of all centres applied to a local or regional public body (other than councils), yet only eight received any funding.

The VAW sector is one of the largest and most influential sub-sectors, and domestic violence refuges are important institutions in the women's sector. In our *Funding to London Women's Refuges* (2007) research, we found that local authorities are the mainstay of income to the domestic violence refuge sector – mostly through Supporting People contracts but also other funding streams.<sup>7</sup> In total, 66% of refuge income (on average) came from local government in 2005-06.

Although there is a general shift from grants to contracts from public bodies across the VCS, the refuge sector was overly reliant on Supporting People contracts, placing them in a vulnerable position. On average, 54% of providers' annual income came from Supporting People contracts, whilst the average annual income from contracts with the state across the VCS was 38%. Therefore, any decreases in the price of contracts, or losing a contract, will have significant effects on providers. This is deeply concerning given that the domestic violence element of Supporting People funding is no longer ring fenced and increasing numbers of specialist women's aid organisations have lost commissions to 'generic' housing providers with little or no track record and expertise in VAW. Whilst only 2-4% of London boroughs' Supporting People grants in 2007-08 were spent on services for 'people at risk of domestic violence', this represented a significant investment in London's VAW sector.

Refuges relied on rent, which was the second largest source of funding after Supporting People contracts. This may have had significant impacts on refuges'

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<sup>5</sup> Benjamin, Allison (2010) *Spending review: questions over charities and the 'big society'*. The Guardian.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/oct/20/charities-and-spending-review>

<sup>6</sup> National Council of Voluntary Organisations (2011) *Charity leaders' confidence levels hit rock bottom*. NCVO.

<http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/news/members/charity-leaders-confidence-levels-hit-rock-bottom>

<sup>7</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2007) *Funding to London Women's Refuges: Report to London Councils*. WRC: London  
[www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/f/fullreportrefugefundingresearch.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/f/fullreportrefugefundingresearch.pdf)

ability and willingness to provide safe housing to women with no recourse to public funds and working women. Funding is also levered in by refuge providers to local boroughs through grants obtained from charitable trusts to deliver a range of services, particularly children's services. However, the largest proportion of all 'other' non-Supporting People funding comes from various local government funding streams.

On average, refuge providers received income from:

Supporting People	54%
Rents	22%
Other local authority funding	12%
Charitable trusts	9%
Pan-London authorities	2%
Central Government	1%

In the refuge research, we found that there was a growing shift towards 'super providers' – 35% of refuge providers had Supporting People contracts in two or more boroughs and this trend has increased between 2007 and today.

With contraction in public spending as a result of the economic downturn, it is crucial that vital services for women are strongly defended. For women's organisations, which rely heavily on local funding, decisions about future local authority spending will undoubtedly have significant impacts on the sector.

### **Gender neutral policy**

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

Many of the participants in our research 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.

Our interviews with staff of women-only services and focus groups with service users found that the misconception that women's equality has been achieved is widespread. This mistaken belief is influencing government policy, which participants commented is becoming increasingly gender neutral.

The impact of the mistaken belief that women's organisations and women-only services are now unnecessary and irrelevant is likely to be significant factor in influencing funding to the women's sector, despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Women's organisations in our research expressed concern about the lack of understanding and expertise generic organisations have in delivering services for women and also reported pressure and coercion to deliver services to men.

## Better representation

With the Government's 'Big Society' and localism agendas, devolution of decision-making to local areas is becoming increasingly important, especially given the women's sector reliance on funding from local government.

In 2006-07, WRC carried out research in partnership with Urban Forum and Oxfam on women's representation in Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs).<sup>8</sup> We found that only 1.8% of VCS representatives (19 out of 1,064) on LSP boards were from women's organisations.

*Where are the women in LSPs?* found that, in general, the senior positions on LSPs were dominated by men and women were over-represented in more 'traditional' roles, such as administrators. Just 28% of Chairs on central LSP boards were women. Nearly three quarters of LSPs did not provide any specific support for women to engage in LSP structures or business, and only 5% formally monitored gender representation.

Even where there were higher levels of representation of women on LSP boards, issues of importance to women or the gender impact of the work of LSPs were not necessarily raised. It is likely that better representation of women's NGOs, who work specifically on 'gender', could improve this.

The lack of representation and influence in decision-making exercised by the women's sector will increasingly disadvantage women's organisations in the funding stakes. Despite clear evidence about the prevalence and impacts of VAW, only four out of 150 Local Area Agreements (LAAs) selected *National Indicator (NI) 26: Specialist support to victims of a serious sexual offence* as one of their priority 35 targets.<sup>9</sup> With so few LAAs prioritising this NI, this was a significant missed opportunity towards securing the sustainability of Rape Crisis centres and raising the profile of sexual violence. In addition, only 75 LAAs prioritised *NI 32: Repeat incidents of domestic violence*.

Whilst the mechanisms for decision-making have changed slightly with the Coalition Government, the issue remains the same: women's VCOs are a key pathway in getting women's voices heard. The Government wants local people to have a bigger say in how resources are allocated at a local level and on other issues that affect their lives, and a greater stake in local democracy. It is difficult to envision how women's voices will be heard and 'women's equality' raised if women's VCOs continue to be disengaged from, and sidelined in, these processes.

## Meeting demand

*The Crisis in Rape Crisis* (2008) research found that 25 organisations had a total of 510 women on waiting lists. The average length of time a survivor spent on a waiting

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<sup>8</sup> Gudnadottir, Elin, Sue Smith, Sue Robson and Darlene Corry (2007) *Where are the women in LSPs?* Urban Forum: London. [www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/w/womenlsp.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/w/womenlsp.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> LAAs are agreements with local councils and their partners about "unique pledges to local people to improve public services and the quality of life". See: Local Government Association and Communities and Local Government (2008) *LAA Annual Review 2008/09*. Communities and Local Government: London [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/973905.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/973905.pdf)

list was 84 days or roughly three months. The total number of average days on waiting lists was 1,929 days – equivalent to 5.3 years.

The capacity to meet demand is linked to resourcing, as our research with Rape Crisis centres showed. Although only 37% of Rape Crisis centres had an annual income of £100,000 or more, these 13 organisations accounted for:

- 68% of paid staff
- 68% of all counselling appointments
- 70% of all helpline calls
- 61% of all contacts with other organisations
- 74% of service users.

The two organisations with an annual income of £300,000 or more saw one third of all service users and provided almost a third of all service outputs.

During 2006, 21 refuge providers surveyed in our *Funding to London Women's Refuges* (2007) research turned away over 2,300 requests for support from women, overwhelmingly because the refuge was full. In particular, BAME providers were more likely to turn women away for this reason.

### **Reliance on volunteers**

*The Crisis in Rape Crisis* (2008) research found that Rape Crisis centres operate with very small numbers of paid staff and rely heavily on volunteers despite high demand for their support. Over-reliance on volunteers is not sustainable, particularly when combined with significant resource restraints.

There were 43 full-time and 103 part-time paid staff and 12 *full-time* and 684 part-time volunteers working for Rape Crisis centres. This was the first time WRC had ever encountered *full-time* volunteers. Eight organisations had made posts redundant or reduced staff hours due to lack of funding. There were instances in six organisations where (paid) staff had worked *without pay* because of a funding crisis. Staff commitment to the well-being of survivors, through the continuation of a quality service even though salaries could no longer be paid, was extremely high.

### **United Nations recommendations**

In 2008 WRC submitted a shadow report, *The state of the women's NGO sector*, to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in response to the United Kingdom's sixth periodic report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.<sup>10</sup>

We highlighted the sustainability of the women's sector and its lack of representation in decision-making and were very pleased that, for the first time,

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<sup>10</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2008) *The state of the women's NGO sector*. WRC: London  
[www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm\\_docs/2008/w/2\\_wrc\\_cedaw\\_shadow\\_report\\_april\\_08.pdf](http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/w/2_wrc_cedaw_shadow_report_april_08.pdf)

CEDAW made a number of recommendations about the importance of government action to secure the future of women's organisations.

In its *Concluding Observations*, CEDAW recommended that the Government should:

- Further develop collaboration with NGOs, including consultation;
- Provide increased and sustained funding to NGOs involved in women's rights;
- Ensure that the Gender Equality Duty is interpreted and applied properly so that women-only services and other activities of women's organisations are not negatively impacted upon;
- Conduct an assessment of the impact of commissioning on funding to women's organisations;
- Include information on funding to women's organisations in the next report to CEDAW;
- Establish additional counselling and other support services for victims of forced marriage;
- Enhance cooperation with and support for NGOs working on forced marriage; and
- Enhance its cooperation with and support, in particular adequate and sustained funding, for NGOs working in the area of violence against women.<sup>11</sup>

WRC and other women's organisations are using the Convention and CEDAW's recommendations to lobby the Government to address the sustainability of the women's sector, including the introduction of more 'temporary special measures'.

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<sup>11</sup> CEDAW (2008) *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*. United Nations: New York <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/cedaws41.htm>

## why women?

The first report of the campaign was *why women? The women's voluntary and community sector: changing lives, changing communities, changing society*. It was based on 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.

The report, published in 2006 to launch the **why women?** campaign, described the women's sector, explored why women's organisations exist and examined the problems they work to address.

### What are women's organisations?

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 emerged, with the majority of organisations overlapping classifications:

1. Front-line organisations
2. Small community groups
3. Second tier organisations
4. Campaigning organisations.

### What issues do women's organisations address?

Workers in 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.

Some of the issues that arose in interviews included:

- Violence against women;
- Dependency making women vulnerable;
- 'No recourse to public funds' rule;
- Extreme poverty;
- Mental health problems;
- Multiple oppression – the intersections of inequality based on gender, race, disability, sexuality etc.;
- Employment discrimination;
- Institutional sexism – gender neutral policy fails women;
- Exclusion from decision-making.

## **What makes women's organisations unique?**

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

### **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:

*"[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%) referred 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 peer support**

The peer-support or self-help element was central to many organisations in this study. Eleven per cent 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:

*"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 less than ten staff (sometimes less than five) to provide support on domestic and sexual violence, 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)*

### **What positive changes do women’s organisations make?**

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.” (Refuge - Tower Hamlets)*

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)

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; and
- Increased protection for trafficked women and asylum seekers.

### **What challenges are women’s organisations facing?**

Many of the challenges and barriers described by the interviewees are common across the VCS as a whole, including:

- Short-term funding;
- Limited capacity for fundraising and bureaucracy;
- Funders’ failure to implement full-cost recovery;
- Increased competition for funding; and
- Finding accessible, affordable and suitable 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:

### **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)*

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)*

## why women-only?

The second report in the campaign, *why women-only? The value and benefits of by women, for women services*, was launched in 2007. This report took an in-depth look at one of the key characteristics identified in the previous *why women?* (2006) research – that of women-only services. It aimed to explore the question which women’s organisations are increasingly being asked by funders and decision-makers: “why are you women-only?”

To enable us to obtain the views of service users, service providers and women from the general public, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods were used including: surveying 101 organisations in the third, public and private sectors about their women-only services; conducting 20 in-depth interviews (19 with staff of women-only third and private sector services and one interview with a female MP); facilitating seven focus groups with service users of women’s organisations; and commissioning a poll with a random sample of 1,000 women throughout the UK about women-only services.

The research primarily focussed on the women’s voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) in England. However, some private and public sector organisations that deliver women-only services participated in the study, enabling us to examine the use of women-only services across different contexts and further explore consumer choice in relation to goods, services and support.

The women-only organisations that participated in the research worked in a wide range of fields, from an all-female theatre company and a professional women’s network, to women’s refuges and Rape Crisis centres.

### **What are the benefits of women-only services?**

In the interviews and focus groups a number of benefits of the services to women as individuals, their wider communities and society as a whole were identified.

#### **Safety**

Safety, both physical and emotional, is a key benefit of women-only services. As a result, women feel supported and comfortable. They become empowered and develop confidence, greater independence and higher self-esteem. They are less marginalised and isolated and feel more able to express themselves. Women using these services feel that their voices are heard and listened to. Through sharing their experiences with other women to make sense of the world together, they develop a sense of solidarity. Participants often described women-only services as a sanctuary:

*“Coming here is a respite, I am grateful that we have got this space to come to. It was a relief when I joined.” (Service user at Leicester Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Centre)*

Women-only services have positive impacts on society. For example, they enable women to better support their families. Many go on to work or volunteer for the VCS as a result of feeling more empowered, having greater skills, improved confidence and being more politicised.

The economic benefits of women-only services are likely to be significant, saving the state millions of pounds per year, such as through improving women's job opportunities or through preventing re-victimisation (e.g. domestic violence) or health problems arising or worsening.

### **Giving women a choice**

The research found that women from all walks of life prefer to use women-only services within a range of different contexts. Some women in the research stated they would not go to mixed services. Their needs would not be met at all if women-only services did not exist.

Our random poll of 1,000 women from the public found that:

- Ninety-seven per cent stated that a woman should have the choice of accessing a women-only support service if they had been the victim of a sexual assault.
- Fifty-six per cent of women would choose a women-only gym over a mixed gym, 28% of women would choose to go to a mixed gym (16% didn't know).
- Of the 560 women that would choose a women-only gym, they cited reasons such as feeling more comfortable, less self-conscious and less intimidated. Respondents stated that they didn't want men watching them, looking at their bodies or sexually harassing them.
- Ninety per cent of women polled believed it was important to have the right to report sexual or domestic violence to a woman (such as a woman Police officer); 87% thought it was important to be able to see a female health professional about sexual or reproductive health matters; and 78% thought it was important to have the choice of a woman professional for counselling and personal support needs.

Women-only services are not exclusively delivered in the VCS, although they certainly are more prominent in the sector because of women's organisations. In Italy a women-only beach was established, as were women-only train carriages in Japan in response to the sexual harassment of female passengers. In the UK, many baths and leisure centres have women-only sessions or spaces to encourage more women to exercise and use the facilities.

The rising number of for-profit women-only services in the private sector demonstrates that there is a demand for women-only services generally. In the free market, women are choosing to spend their money on women-only, rather than general, goods and services. This includes women-only gyms, health and beauty spas, holidays, insurance and mini-cabs. Parents are still prepared to pay to send their girl children to single-sex private schools in the belief that it will better meet girls' needs, will improve their educational outcomes and increase their self-confidence.

For each of the different research methods used, there was confirmation that many women have a personal preference for women-only services and, given the choice, will choose single-sex services over those which are mixed.

There was evidence that many service users would not access support if it was not women-only. Therefore, many women in need of vital support services would not receive them. The possible consequences could include deterioration in health, missed employment and educational opportunities, ongoing violence etc.

Creative and Supportive Trust (CAST), an organisation which works with women ex/offenders and those at risk of offending, found that 80% of service users interviewed stated it was 'very important' that CAST was a women-only space. Forty-four percent of students said they would not attend if CAST had not been a women-only space. CAST's survey also found that 64% of users would prefer women-only services in areas such as group counselling, hospital wards, mental health services, housing associations, health clinics, parenting classes and counselling.

There is certainly a bottom line to be considered. If women-only services continue to be undermined, and in worst case scenarios are forced to close, there will be significant costs to the state through increased use of public services as a result of worsening social, economic, welfare, health, employment, criminal justice and education problems that could be avoided through sustainably funding women's organisations and their women-only services.

### **Self-determination for minority groups of women**

Some groups of women experience greater marginalisation and isolation and have particular experiences as a result of being both female and the impacts of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, disabilism, class, poverty, health status etc. (often referred to as intersectional discrimination). Women-only services develop to meet need, so those services which are led by and for specific communities of women (such as BAME, lesbian, bisexual, older and younger women, lone mothers, mental health survivors etc.) are crucial.

These women-only services are often able to reach women who would not otherwise engage with services, either in public or third sectors (including general women's organisations). As with women-only services generally, women from minority groups expect that women from their own or similar backgrounds will have a better understanding of their experiences and issues and greater empathy than men or women who do not share their backgrounds.

Organisations led by and for minority women are necessary in addressing social exclusion and community cohesion. They enable integration through empowering and building the confidence of their service users, and by helping women who are often on the margins of communities to access opportunities that many other people take for granted:

*"I've learnt more here in the last six months than I did in the last 18 years. If I was this clever then, imagine what I could have done! Now I can speak to anyone, I can take my baby girl out, travel and see London... Nobody can touch me because I*

*came here. I celebrated my daughter's birthday the other week; I couldn't have done that before."* (Service user at Greenwich Asian Women's Project)

As well as providing physical, psychological and emotional safety and sanctuary, minority women-only services empower and politicise women. Women see and hear that their experiences of sexism and racism or homophobia etc. are not isolated. They find mutual support and self-determination.

Organisations which are led by and for minority women are essential in addressing prejudice and discrimination and furthering women's rights. Their existence strengthens the women's VCS. For example, BAME women's organisations have been primarily responsible for bringing the plight of women and girls who are subjected to forced marriage, female genital mutilation, inhumane immigration rules, so-called 'honour' killings etc. to the attention of government, the third sector and the public in general. As a result, many important legislative changes have been made. All women, therefore, benefit from these advances in rights and protection.

### **Why are organisations women-only?**

Almost a quarter (23%) of respondents to the survey stated they were women-only because of women's inequality and the need to address wide gender power imbalances and provide space outside of the perceived male-dominated mainstream.

Twenty per cent stated that women-only spaces provide an environment that promotes empowerment (such as freedom of expression and development of confidence) and 18% stated that being women-only meets a need that is not being met by mainstream services and which recognises the different and specific needs of women.

### **What challenges are women-only services facing?**

Following on from the 2006 research, organisations were asked about any specific challenges faced because they were women-only:

#### **Undervalued and misunderstood**

As Patricia McFadden, an African feminist scholar, has argued, women-only space is inherently political.<sup>12</sup> Women-only services are a legacy of the Women's Movement and represent the need for women's rights to self-determination and 'voice'.

Our interviews with staff of women-only services and focus groups with service users found that the misconception that women's equality has been achieved is widespread. This mistaken belief is influencing government policy, which

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<sup>12</sup> McFadden, P (2001) *Why women's spaces are critical to feminist autonomy*. Taken from: [http://www.isiswomen.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=630:why-womens-spaces-are-critical-to-feminist-autonomy&catid=127:theme-mens-involvement-in-womens-empowerment](http://www.isiswomen.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=630:why-womens-spaces-are-critical-to-feminist-autonomy&catid=127:theme-mens-involvement-in-womens-empowerment)

participants commented is becoming increasingly gender neutral, and is affecting the sustainability of women's organisations.

There is a lack of understanding about women-only services, which coupled with the 'equality myth', is resulting in women-only services being increasingly pressured to justify why their services are women-only. As a result, some women's organisations reported that funders and decision-makers are pressuring their organisations to deliver services to men and viewing women-only services as irrelevant and unnecessary.

### **Securing sustainable funding**

In 2002/03, only 1.2% of central Government funding to the VCS in the UK went to women's organisations,<sup>13</sup> despite making up 7% of registered charities.<sup>14</sup> In 2006, WRC conducted a snapshot audit of 26 different central Government funding streams. The research found that, along with LGBT organisations, the women's sector receives less funding than any other equalities groups.

As to be expected, funding was the main challenge cited by interview participants:

*"...we know of an organisation that provides women-only space to women with mental health and substance misuse issues and it lost its funds from the local authority. Now there is nothing available to them at all. At the end of the day, if women-only spaces were actually seen as important then the funding would be there!" (Women's Refuge Project)*

In the survey of 101 organisations for the 2006 report, 70% of respondents felt that being a women-only organisation made it harder to access funding, while just 3% felt that it made it easier (27% reported no difference).

We were also concerned to find in the snapshot audit, that there was a significant difference in favour of generic organisations delivering projects to women over women's organisations. This was the case in 15% (4) of the funds examined. Funding to women's organisations in the Victims Fund (Provision for Victims of Sexual Offending) decreased by 20% from 2004/05, yet funding to generic organisations to deliver sexual violence services to women increased by 6.6%. Women's VCOs in this research expressed concern about the lack of understanding and expertise generic organisations have in delivering services for women.

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<sup>13</sup> Mocroft, I and M. Zimmeck (2004) *Central government funding of voluntary and community organisations 1982/83 to 2002/02*. Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate: London.

<http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/misc39.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Figures based on 2006 GuideStar data identifying 11,520 organisations naming 'women' and/or 'girls' as their main beneficiaries representing 6.9% of registered charities ([www.guidestar.org.uk](http://www.guidestar.org.uk)).

# The Crisis in Rape Crisis

In 2007 we worked in partnership with Rape Crisis (England Wales) to conduct research into the financial sustainability of Rape Crisis centres. WRC, Rape Crisis (England Wales) and many other women's organisations were becoming increasingly worried about the future of such vital services as centres closed their doors because of lack of financial support.

Thirty-five of the 38 Rape Crisis (England and Wales) affiliated members responded to an in-depth survey. The report on the survey findings, *The Crisis in Rape Crisis*, was published on 18 March 2008 – the day before the Minister for Women announced an emergency fund to prevent further closures of centres. This emergency fund, and the subsequent interim funds from the Government Equalities Office to shore-up the Rape Crisis sector in the short-term were very welcomed but it was stressed that longer-term solutions for financial sustainability were needed. In 2010, with £1.4m from the Mayor of London over three years, three new centres were established in London and the capital's only existing centre received much needed resources. Other centres across the country have also been established. In early 2011, the Ministry of Justice announced the Rape Support Fund for Rape Crisis centres of £10.5m over three years, and as of April 2011 the number of centres affiliated to Rape Crisis (England and Wales) stood at 50.

## What are Rape Crisis centres?

Member groups of Rape Crisis (England and Wales) provide specialist, dedicated services to (primarily) women and girls who have experienced rape, childhood sexual abuse and/or other forms of sexual violence.

Since the late 1970s, Rape Crisis centres have provided services to women and girls in a women-centred and often women-only environment, where survivors can talk to specialist staff and volunteers about their experiences of sexual violence. They encourage self-referrals and have a long history of working from a feminist perspective and within a framework of empowerment.

The Rape Crisis sector campaigns and raises awareness of the impact of sexual violence and the needs of those affected by sexual violence, including the hidden needs of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

## Where were centres located?

All regions in England and Wales are vastly under-served. Most women do not have access to a Rape Crisis centre and access to support is a postcode lottery. There are few Rape Crisis centres relative to the large populations they cover, and centres are often responsible for vast geographical areas, even with the establishment of new centres.

In 2008 centres affiliated to Rape Crisis (England and Wales) were located in the East of England (seven centres); Yorkshire and Humber (six centres); North West (five centres); the South East (four centres); East Midlands, North East and West

Midlands (three centres each); and finally, North Wales and Greater London had one centre each in 2007.

## **What kind of support do centres provide?**

A total of 498 services were delivered, ranging from two to 20 different services per organisation.

Rape Crisis centres offer a wide range of support and information for survivors, families, friends and professionals including:

- Telephone helplines;
- Face-to-face counselling and support;
- Group work;
- Advocacy (such as supporting women to access the criminal justice system or housing);
- Practical support; and
- Supervision for other agencies.

On average, a centre delivered 14 types of services. Face-to-face counselling and telephone helplines were the most common types of services delivered.

However, only 21% of services were fully-funded.

## **Who do centres support?**

Rape Crisis centres work with women and girls of all ages, from three to 84 years old, and come from a wide-range of backgrounds.

Many survivors would not access centres if they were not women-only. Women-only and women-led services provide safe spaces for survivors of sexual violence to address their experiences.

Twenty-seven centres reported that 8,669 survivors had accessed counselling services in 2007-08 – a (mean) average of 321 women per organisation. However, this figure was only the number of women provided with counselling and not the total number of service users seen by Rape Crisis centres. The total number of users across all services was likely to be very high given that there were 109,958 helpline calls and counselling sessions in the 12 month period looked at in the research.

Rape Crisis centres primarily support women and girls who: have experienced historic sexual violence (including adult survivors of childhood sexual assault); have complex needs; and who do not report their assault to the police. Many had never told their experiences to anyone before, or accessed any other support.

Sixty-one per cent of survivors who were supported by Rape Crisis centres had sexual violence experiences which happened three or more years ago (i.e. before

2004) and centres were a crucial support service for women with historic experiences of sexual violence (such as childhood sexual abuse). In addition, 85% of women were identified as having 'complex needs'.

Nineteen centres stated that they had no restrictions on the length of time that survivors could access support (such as counselling). Of the 14 centres that did have time limits in place, the length of support ranged from four months to two years, with an average of one year.

On average, just 10% of survivors who accessed Rape Crisis centres reported the experience/s to the police.

Other beneficiaries also included public and third sector organisations with which centres had regular contact.

### **What positive changes do centres make?**

Respondents and service user evaluations reported that the positive effects of accessing Rape Crisis centres impact, not just on survivors, but also their loved ones and wider communities. Survivors reported outcomes ranging from improved mental well being and a reduction in self-harming, better inter-personal relationships, ability to return to work or study, ability to reduce or stop medication, etc.

Despite being grossly under-funded, Rape Crisis centres provide professional support which makes a significant impact on the lives of survivors. Because there are few Rape Crisis centres they cover wide geographical areas, often supporting women (and men) within a hundred mile radius.

Rape Crisis centre staff and volunteers hold a large number of relevant qualifications and often have decades of combined experience working in this field. They provide high quality specialist support which enables women to address the impact abuse has on their lives and challenge the myths that blame women for sexual violence.

The level of commitment of staff and volunteers to keep services running during times of financial crises was extremely high, albeit at a personal cost to workers.

Rape Crisis centres produce an astonishing amount of service outputs (counselling appointments, helpline calls and advocacy sessions), particularly given their high reliance on volunteers and the lack of funding received. They also support other agencies, engage in government consultations, undertake prevention work, and provide expertise to and take referrals from health and other statutory bodies.

Rape Crisis centres are user-led and most support women for as long as needed, sometimes over a number of years. Rape Crisis centres support a relatively large number of women, particularly those centres with annual incomes over £100,000.

Despite the many positive benefits reported by Rape Crisis centres, organisations felt there were low levels of awareness about the work of Rape Crisis, both amongst the general public and government decision-makers.

## **What challenges are centres facing?**

### **Securing sustainable funding**

In 1984 there were 68 Rape Crisis centres in England and Wales, but at the time of the research (2008), there were just 38 centres affiliated to Rape Crisis (England and Wales) left. Nine Rape Crisis centres had closed between 2003-08.

In 2006-07 the 35 Rape Crisis centres that responded to the survey had a combined annual income of £3,570,912. In 2004-05, the Government spent more than twice this amount on advertising and public relations each week.

Sixty-three per cent of Rape Crisis centres had an annual income of £100,000 or less. The average income was £81,598, only marginally more than the cost, to the state, of one rape. Funding to some of the larger Sexual Assault Referral Centres is five times this average income.

The average incomes of centres in the North West, South East and East of England were significantly lower than in other English regions and the centre in North Wales.

Securing funding was a relentless and constant challenge; often resulting in low staff morale and/or, in worst case scenarios, the 'freezing' or closure of services (resulting in survivors not receiving the support they needed).

Grant funding received in 2006-07 was examined in-depth. There were 161 grants reported, ranging in value from £200 to £202,000. The total value of this funding was £2,762,627, and the average grant was just £8,650. Thirty-two per cent of this funding came from councils and related partnerships, 26% from the Home Office and 23% from charitable grant givers. However, where the funding came from did not reflect where centres were applying to. For example, over half of all centres applied to a local or regional public body (other than councils), yet only eight received any funding.

Of the 161 grants, 22 were Service Level Agreements (SLAs). Almost one third of these SLAs were for three or more years, compared with just 10% of all grants.

Given the low value of the average grant received, it was not surprising that Rape Crisis centres submitted a disproportionate number of applications compared with the funding received. For example one organisation received just £77,000 (in total) from 14 funders.

Many centres stated that they felt compelled to keep costs low in funding applications, such as costing salaries well below the market value, in order to improve their chances of receiving any funding.

Seventy-nine per cent of grants were for one year or less.

Sixty-nine per cent of centres said they were 'unsustainable' in the future and, at the time of the survey, eight organisations had not secured funding for 2008-09.

There were 43 full-time and 103 part-time paid staff and 12 full-time and 684 part-time volunteers working for Rape Crisis centres. Eight organisations had made posts redundant or reduced staff hours due to lack of funding. There were instances in six organisations where staff had worked *without pay* because of a funding crisis. Staff commitment to the well-being of survivors, through the continuation of a quality service even though salaries could no longer be paid, was extremely high.

The data indicated that there was a strong relationship between annual income and levels and types of services delivered. Although only 37% of Rape Crisis centres had an annual income of £100,000 or more, these 13 organisations accounted for:

Paid staff	68%
All counselling appointments	68%
All helpline calls	70%
All contacts with other organisations	61%
Service users	74%

In addition, these 13 centres were far more likely to negotiate multi-year SLAs of greater value. The two organisations with an annual income of £300,000 or more saw one third of all service users and provided almost a third of all service outputs.

### **Challenges to women-only services**

While women-only services were effective and wanted by service users, they were being challenged by a range of statutory agencies. Some centres had funding refused on the basis of being women-only or had been pressured to deliver services to men - 15 centres had been challenged by funders about being women-only.

### **Meeting demand**

Twenty-five organisations had a total of 510 women on waiting lists. The average length of time a survivor spent on a waiting list was 84 days or roughly three months.

The total number of average days on waiting lists was 1,929 days – equivalent to 5.3 years.

### **Reliance on volunteers**

Rape Crisis centres operated with very small numbers of paid staff and relied heavily on volunteers, yet demand for their work was high. Over-reliance on volunteers is not sustainable, particularly when combined with significant resource restraints.

# Not just bread, but roses, too

*Not just bread, but roses, too: funding to the women's voluntary and community sector in England 2004-07* was published in partnership with the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2009.

*Not just bread, but roses, too* provides the most comprehensive picture of the women's VCS in England to date. It set out to map the sector across England and answer key strategic questions such as:

- Where are organisations based?
- What areas are they working in?
- Are they focusing on any specific equality strands?
- What is the income and expenditure of organisations?
- What are the regional differences?

The research was based on data from 1,348 registered charities purchased from GuideStar UK. However, not all 1,348 organisations had consecutive income and expenditure data for all three years from 2004 and the financial analysis was based on data from 751 organisations.

## What issues do women's organisations address?

Over a quarter of organisations (26%) worked in the violence against women (VAW) field, three quarters of which worked in domestic violence. The East Midlands had the highest proportion of organisations working in VAW (37%). London had the largest number of organisations working in VAW, yet these organisations represented only 13% of organisations in the region.

Most organisations that worked in the VAW area provided domestic violence services (79%), and one in five (21%) worked in sexual violence. The proportions are consistent with the *Map of Gaps* reports (2007 and 2009) which found that, of specialised services mapped (across the UK and mainly in the third sector, but including statutory services as well), 73% were in the domestic violence sector and 17% were in the sexual violence sector.<sup>15</sup>

One in five organisations (22%) were categorised as providing general services to women (i.e. covered a range of areas, such as women's centres); 17% of organisations focused on education, employment and training; and 14% of organisations worked in the health field.

Of organisations working in the health field, a third (33%) provided 'general' health services. This included organisations that worked across a number of health issues, or

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<sup>15</sup> Coy, M., Kelly, L., et al (2009) *Map of Gaps 2: The postcode lottery of violence against women services in Britain*. End Violence Against Women Coalition and Equality and Human Rights Commission: London; and Coy, M., Kelly, L., et al (2007) *Map of Gaps: The Postcode Lottery of Violence Against Women Support Services*. End Violence Against Women Coalition and Equality and Human Rights Commission: London. See: [www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/pages/resources.html](http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/pages/resources.html)

where a specialist field could not be determined. Fifteen per cent provided pregnancy-related activities such as breastfeeding and ante- and postnatal support. Thirteen per cent delivered mental health services. Twelve per cent of organisations that worked in health provided cancer support services (such as breast or gynaecological cancers).

## **Which equalities groups do women's organisations specifically work with?**

Only 1% of all organisations focused on lesbian, bisexual and trans women. Proportions of organisations focusing on this group were similar across all regions.

Over half of all organisations (53%) focused on delivering services to girls and young women.

On average across all regions, one in three organisations focused on BAME women. Over half of all organisations in London focused on BAME women, as did one in three organisations in the West Midlands (37%) and the North West (33%). Of the 477 organisations that focused on minority ethnic communities, 31% worked specifically with Black women and 35% with Asian women. Fifty-two organisations worked with 'other' ethnic groups (Afghani, Arab, Chinese, Cypriot, Greek, Iraqi, Japanese, Moroccan, Nepali, Roma, Thai, Turkish, Vietnamese, Latin American and Yemeni women. Seven organisations worked with 'White other' women and focused on Irish, including Traveller, and Albanian women).

Twenty-seven per cent of organisations had services specifically for older women and 22% for disabled women.

One in ten organisations had targeted services for women from particular religions or faith groups and only 4% of organisations focussed on refugee and asylum seeking women.

## **Where are women's organisations located?**

A third of organisations (225) were based in London. This was significantly higher than for all general charities (16% of general charities were based in London). In the capital there were 1.4 organisations per 10,000 population of women aged 15 years or older.

The North West had the second largest women's sector (90 organisations); followed by Yorkshire and the Humber (87); South East (75); East of England (66); West Midlands (64); East Midlands (56); and the South West (49). The North East had the least number of organisations - only 5% of all organisations mapped were based in this region (56 organisations).

In the South East and South West there were only 0.4 organisations per 10,000 women, despite the fact that these regions have the highest number of general charities per population in England - 3.8 and 4.4 general charities per 1,000 population (respectively).

## **What does the financial picture in the women's sector look like?**

One in five organisations (18%) had no financial data for any of the three years examined and, therefore, there is a high likelihood that these organisations have closed.

Only 56% of organisations had financial data for all three years of the study and all of the financial analysis is based on these 751 organisations.

In 2006/07, 751 organisations had a total income of £274 million. The total income of organisations increased by approximately 8% each year.

When inflation was factored in however, the increase was 5.5%, which was lower than the overall real increase of 9.4% for general registered charities in the UK. In real terms, total incomes in the North West and South East decreased year-on-year. The largest increases in income were in London and the East of England.

Expenditure increased at a higher rate than increases in income. Subsequently the gap between income and expenditure narrowed particularly in the North West, London and the East of England. In 2004/05 there was an overall surplus of 8% but by 2006/07 this had narrowed to 3%.

Organisations with income of £1 million or more made up 6% of all organisations but accounted for half of all income. This is consistent with charities in general.

Half of all organisations (51%) had an income of £100k-1m. This is significantly higher than charities in general (12%). Organisations in the £100k-1m income band accounted for 46% of all income.

Twenty-seven per cent of organisations with an income of £10k-100k experienced high income volatility – i.e. an increase in income one year followed by a decrease the next year (or vice versa) of 20% or more. This was significantly higher than charities in general (17%).

Of all organisations with an income of £100k or less, organisations in the North East were most likely to experience high income volatility.

Groups with an income of £10k or less represented 16% of all organisations; significantly lower than for charities in general (55%).

# Case studies

## Refuge - Tower Hamlets

Refuge – Tower Hamlets (formerly Tower Hamlets Women’s Aid) was set up in 1975 and provides support, information and advice to women affected by domestic violence. It provides 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.

The women who access Refuge - Tower Hamlets 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:

*“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 a 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. 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.

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:

*"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."*

*"We have time; time is our gift. We don't treat people as targets or a number. They are individuals to us. We are sensitive, empathic and caring we enable them but we don't push them. We are professional but sensitive. For us it's about quality and not numbers despite the fact that we have to keep monitoring and evaluation records. We can give something other organisations might not: informality. A woman's path to well being comes from her and we help bring it out."<sup>16</sup>*

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 offers invaluable insight into the inner workings and crucial importance of 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:

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<sup>16</sup> From *Hillingdon Women's Centre Spring 2011 Newsletter*. p.5

*“Back in the ‘70s and ‘80s there was the [Greater London Council] 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.”*

Like many other workers in women's organisations, the co-ordinator of the Centre first started as a volunteer:

*“...the journey began in 1991 when I started as a volunteer. By 1992, a few friends and I pioneered a mental health support group called *New Horizons*. I have been a part of the centre ever since. For many years, I thought I should apply for the post of coordinator but something always stopped me. However, by 2002, I finally felt ready to apply. I became coordinator for the first time.”<sup>17</sup>*

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

The Women's Environmental Network (WEN) is a campaigning organisation which addresses 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 runs a local food campaign, a Real Nappy project, and activities addressing stress incontinence, sanitary protection and waste prevention. 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.”*

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. Since then, 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:

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid

*"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 Standards 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.

### **Latin American Women's Rights Service**

Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS), based in the London borough of Islington, supports thousands of women annually, all of whom have a range of different needs depending on their individual circumstances. Consequently, they provide advice to women in a range of areas including housing, debt, welfare benefits, domestic violence advice and support and other areas, such as parenting, support for accessing mainstream services, English lessons, and, very importantly, counselling because many of their service users suffer from difficulties related to trauma (including domestic violence and abuse experienced in their countries of origin).

*"The other thing that makes us particularly useful to many of our users is that we have a number of key services all in one place and that includes, for example, a crèche attached to all our advice services. So women can come to us, bring their young children and leave them in the crèche where they know they are going to be well looked after and safe while they talk to us. So if they need to express their feelings of fear, anxiety, sadness, despair, trauma, they can do so safely with the knowledge that the children are not overhearing and that the children are safe and well looked after. Many of our users tell us over and over again the importance of this, that our service has been thought through so that women who don't have a support network or cannot pay for a minder, can still access information, support, free counselling and therapy in their own language."*

*"[Latin American Women's Rights Service] was set up to address the lack of equal opportunities that Latin American women face in the UK, on many different levels - race, gender, class, immigration status, language and also lack of familiarity with the system here. All these are barriers [which put Latin American women] on an unequal footing in many different ways."*

## **Leicester Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Centre (Women's Wednesday Group)**

The Leicester Lesbian Gay and Bisexual Centre is a voluntary organisation established to support lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

The Women's Wednesday Group for lesbians met at the centre once a week, and had been running for over a decade. Even when the centre could not find funding for the project for a time, women continued to run the group themselves, because they found it so empowering to be with other lesbians. If the group didn't exist these women said they would feel isolated and alone:

*"Everyone has a right to know who they are and to feel safe, it's a basic human need, and this group allows that."*

The lesbians who came to this group described it as an incredibly supportive space where women can come and feel free to just be themselves. Despite the focus on the social aspect of the group, women found coming to the group was a break from the constant homophobia they experience, in almost every other part of their lives:

*"Why would we want to mix with a normal women's group? We do that all the time anyway. We know that in this space we all understand each other, we don't have to be guarded or feel like you are alone, or are the only person who has experienced doubts and worries."*

The women from the group felt that its importance was that the issue of identifying as 'lesbian', the sense of always having to constantly 'come-out' at work, with friends and family, every single day, could be set aside. In this space sexuality is almost irrelevant but also highly relevant at the same time, because it can be set aside in the knowledge that every woman there has a common bond and has had a struggle to reach this point:

*"We are all at different stages on a journey but it is the same journey, that's what links us."*

## **Women Acting In Today's Society**

Women Acting In Today's Society (WAITS) was set up in 1992 to enable women to overcome barriers so that they can take action individually and collectively to make changes in their lives and their communities. As well as directly supporting women who are facing or recovering from domestic violence, WAITS' works with women from diverse backgrounds to build supportive networks and groups, address personal and social issues, receive training and take action together to bring about change.

One of the focus group participants for the *why women-only?* (2007) research described how her involvement in WAITS has evolved over the years and how being in a women-only environment helped her through a difficult period, enabling her to get and hold down a job in a mixed organisation:

*"I first came as a student. I was at uni doing my dissertation on Black women and domestic violence...My son was about two at the time and he's nearly 12 now so he's grown up coming to events as well because there was a crèche available. The most important thing for me was, I had a year out of my paid job for personal circumstances and I was really nervous about going back to work. So I came back to do my volunteering and it was nice to just get used to being in the work environment again. Because everyone at WAITS knew why I was off I was still made to feel really comfortable and just get on with my job and not made to feel awkward. That was a really big thing. I've only been back to my paid job now since May and I was really nervous until I started coming here in January again. My paid work is in a mixed environment, men and women, so this [WAITS] sort of helped me. It was really nice – it is always a nice atmosphere."*

Many of the women at WAITS described how it had empowered them, increased their confidence and raised their aspirations for what they could achieve. In many cases the organisation enables women to lift themselves out of low-paid, dead-end jobs or unemployment.

*"WAITS has just totally and utterly made me ask 'why?'. Why should I work every single second of every single day for peanuts? Why not have the confidence to take things into my own hands and try something new? And so because of WAITS I've decided now that I'm going to train and do drama therapy, and that was basically through WAITS empowering me to not settle for second class, second best. So it is confidence, empowerment and a vision really..."*

WAITS exemplifies the way many women-only organisations empower women one-by-one and in doing so strengthen their families and communities.

NB: Refuge – Tower Hamlets, Hillingdon Women's Centre and Women's Environmental Network case studies are from *why women?* (2006). All other case studies are from *why-women only?* (2007).