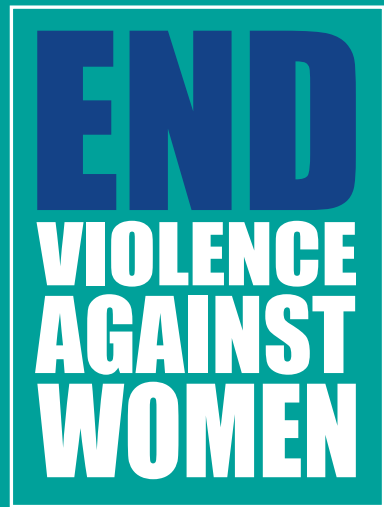
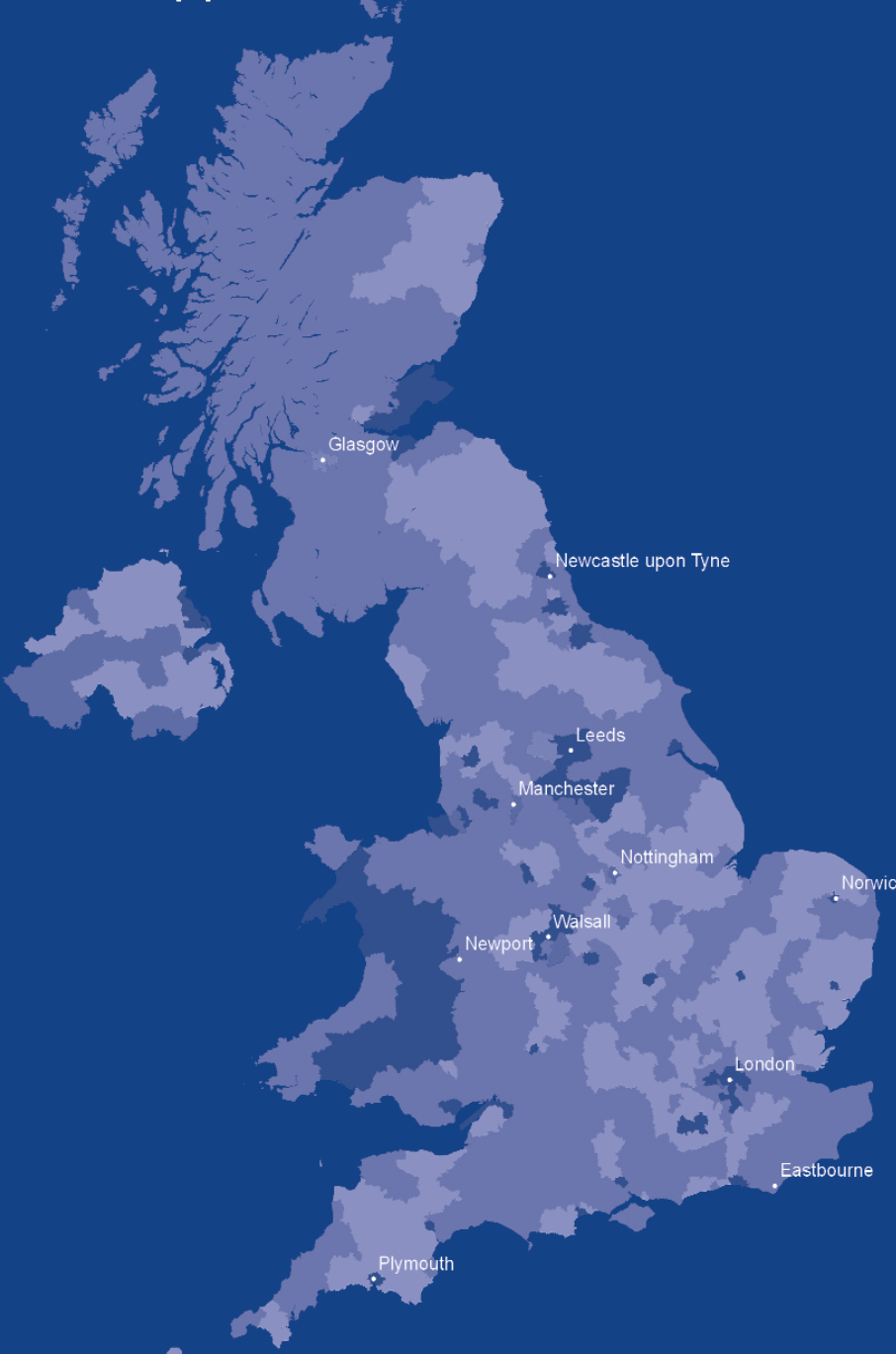


SUMMARY

Map of Gaps:

The Postcode Lottery of
Violence Against Women
Support Services



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and Jo Foord**

**with Val Balding and
Rebecca Davenport**

In partnership with



Acknowledgements

Map of Gaps is a project born of and nurtured by many minds. Special thanks go to the Roddick Foundation for providing the possibility for CWASU to pursue research that we wanted to do. We dedicate this study, and the campaigning which it will inform, to the memory of Anita Roddick, who believed, like us, that women have the right to live free from violence. She championed women's services, understanding the unique and vital role they play in undoing some of the harms of violence and in holding societies to account to ensure they accord all women respect, dignity and redress for human rights violations.

Alongside the authors a number of other women contributed substantially to the data collection and analysis: Val Balding began the project, developing the initial databases and regional analysis; Rebecca Davenport completed the regional analysis. Other colleagues in CWASU provided input and editorial support.

Second tier groups and individuals across the nations and regions have checked our database against their own records. Members of the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) Coalition contributed expert advice on the project as a whole, and Holly Dustin, manager of the EVAW campaign, has provided invaluable input throughout.

Final acknowledgement must go to the services included in this report, who continue to provide specialised and quality support to women on limited resources and recognition.

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Executive Summary

Over three million women across the UK experience violence each year and for these women specialised support services are essential for their access to safety, justice and the ability to move on with their lives. For the first time ever, *Map of Gaps* demonstrates graphically that women in the UK face a postcode lottery in their access to basic support services. Whilst a minority of women live in an area where there are good services, too many women face patchy provision at best, and at worst there is no support at all.

The best story to be told is in Scotland where provision is distributed more equally and furthermore is the only part of the UK where there has been an expansion of Rape Crisis Centres. The reason is simple; the Scottish government is developing a strategic approach to addressing violence against women and has allocated ring-fenced funding for services.

Key recommendation: End Violence Against Women and the Equality and Human Rights Commission are calling on national governments and local authorities to take urgent action to ensure consistent national coverage and funding of specialised third sector support services for all women.

The Commission considers this issue to be a key test against which it will judge British Government departments and local authorities in assessing how they meet their legal obligations under the Gender Equality Duty.

Scale of the Problem

According to the UN, violence against women (VAW) is ‘any act of gender-based violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately.’ VAW in the UK includes: Rape and sexual assault; domestic violence; forced marriage; sexual harassment and stalking; trafficking and sexual exploitation; crimes in the name of honour; and female genital mutilation.

Whilst under some measures men are more likely to be victims of violence, this is not usually part of a recurrent pattern of behaviour. Nor are most of the violent incidents men are subjected to a cause and a consequence of inequality, as VAW is. The violence that women experience is commonly committed by known men – partners, family members, friends, work colleagues. In addition, sexual harassment in public is widespread and contributes to women’s fear of crime and whether they feel safe in public spaces at night. Women are twice as likely as men to be worried about violent crime.

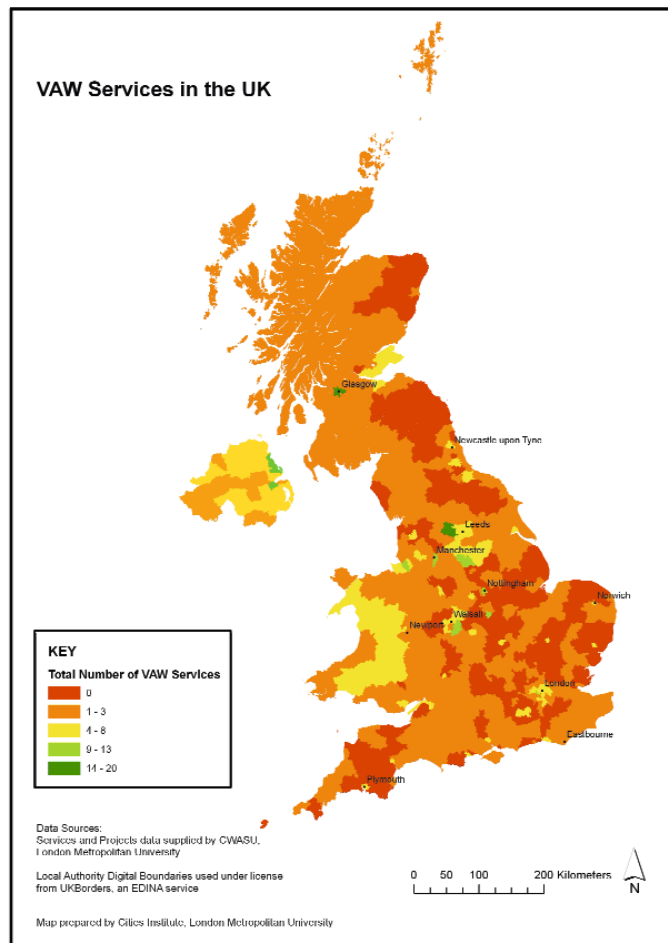
VAW is also an issue that cuts across ethnicity, age, disability and other categories: Girls and young women are more likely to experience sexual violence; older women are more likely to be abused by carers than older men; women with mental health problems and learning disabilities are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and yet these groups are least likely to see the perpetrator brought to justice. Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women face

additional barriers to accessing support and experience particular forms of violence, such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and crimes in the name of honour.

The stark fact is that across the UK three million women experience violence each year, and almost half these incidents will be serious and/or repeated. In addition, there are many, many more women who have suffered violence in the past as children or adults and who need support to deal with the legacies of victimisation. Potential service users, therefore, are in their millions.

For these women, specialised support services¹ are vital for their immediate safety, access to justice and ability to move on with their lives.

Map of Gaps shows graphically for the first time that access to support is a postcode lottery in that it depends on where you live. In addition, many services are facing a crisis in their funding because of new commissioning processes and the move towards funding generic rather than women-specific services. We have already witnessed a tide of closures and many other services are creaking under the weight of demand; helplines are often engaged, refuges are full, Rape Crisis and survivors groups have long waiting lists and the new domestic and sexual violence advisors are having to ration their support to individuals designated highest risk.



- A third of local authorities across the UK have no specialised VAW support service.
- Most women in the UK have no access to a Rape Crisis Centre and fewer than one quarter of local authorities have any sexual violence service at all.
- A very small proportion of the UK is covered by existing Sexual Assault Referral Centres.
- Fewer than 1 in 10 of local authorities have specialised services for BME women which would address forced marriage, female genital mutilation and crimes in the name of honour, as well as other forms of violence.
- Almost one third of local authorities have no domestic violence services.
- Fewer than 1 in 10 local authorities have services for women in prostitution.

Five areas are particularly underserved: The East of England; London; Northern Ireland; the North West; and the South East. In three cases these are regions with large percentages of the population; in two there are smaller populations but extensive rural areas. Women in Northern Ireland appear especially poorly served with no provision across a number of the services mapped here.

Very few areas can claim to have sufficient service provision to meet the needs of their female population who have recently suffered violence, let alone the many more who struggle to cope with legacies from the past. We commend the nine areas with the most extensive provision – Birmingham, Bradford, Glasgow, Hammersmith & Fulham, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham and Sheffield – but note that at least three of these have minimal sexual violence services.

It is apparent that where government steers provision a more consistent geographical spread is possible. In contrast, where decisions are left to localised decision-making the postcode lottery is reinforced. We share the concerns of the VAW sector that local commissioning, and the move towards larger and more generic providers, will not only reduce the number of specialised services but in the process, will also lead to the loss of the incalculable institutional skills and expertise of these organisations.

What is the Impact of the Postcode Lottery?

The postcode lottery is hugely costly, both to the lives of individual women and to society more broadly. The impact of violence ranges from: Physical injury; gynaecological disorders; psychological consequences, including long-term mental health issues, self-harm and suicide; disruption in intimate relationships; constrained socio-economic opportunities at the societal level; and wider social exclusion. It is estimated that the human and emotional cost of domestic violence in England and Wales in one year alone is £17 billion. Using a case study approach, we estimate that in Hammersmith & Fulham where there *are* services, the cost to the State of providing dedicated and specialised support to a woman and her children that enables them to establish safety is £9,654, while in Shrewburyness, where there are no appropriate services, her situation could spiral to an ultimate cost to the State of £337,054.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Equality duties on the public sector have been introduced across the UK, most recently, the Gender Equality Duty in England, Wales and Scotland. This requires all public bodies to take steps to eliminate unlawful sex discrimination and harassment and promote equality of opportunity between women and men. Many British public bodies, including government departments and local authorities, also have specific duties which include setting gender equality objectives, publishing them in Gender Equality Schemes and carrying out gender impact assessments on new and existing policies. The Office of the

Third Sector, within the Cabinet Office, should therefore be assessing the gender impact of current funding policies under both national and local processes. This should include an investigation into the extent to which a) support for specialised services is part of gender equality schemes; b) generic providers are being preferred in competitive tendering processes at local levels; and c) funding for frontline services is compliant with the Government's COMPACT with the Third Sector.

Map of Gaps documents significant shortfalls in the provision of specialised services across the UK and demonstrates how a strategic approach to VAW results in better and more equal service provision. The reality is that the greatest demand for support will fall on non-statutory services and we are calling upon government at all levels to recognise and value the historic and current contributions of the women's voluntary sector in addressing VAW and providing support according to women's needs. This recognition should include harnessing their expertise in policy development and ensuring stable and long-term funding strategies.

The experience of Scotland proves that investment in frontline voluntary sector support services produces a significant return. Scotland should, therefore, be regarded as a benchmark with respect to its strategic approach, its recognition that violence is a cause and consequence of women's inequality and its commitment to enhancing capacity and diversity of provision. National and regional governments should follow the model of the Scottish Government in developing VAW strategies which have a core commitment to funding specialised support services. This should also be considered as part of their legal obligations under the public sector equality duties.

Local authorities across the UK should follow the model of Glasgow City Council and commit to long-term funding of specialised support services for victims of violence. This should be part of a strategic approach on VAW and should be considered as part of their legal obligations under the public sector equality duties.

Over the next year, governments in England, Northern Ireland and Wales should develop a funding framework for specialised frontline services, similar to the VAW Fund in Scotland, to ensure that all women across the UK have access to these vital services.

Women deserve access to quality support services. To continue with the current situation is simply too costly, not only to women themselves but also to society more broadly. We must end the postcode lottery by bridging the gaps.

1 VAW support services are defined as organisations that work primarily on violence *and* provide significant direct support to female victims/survivors.