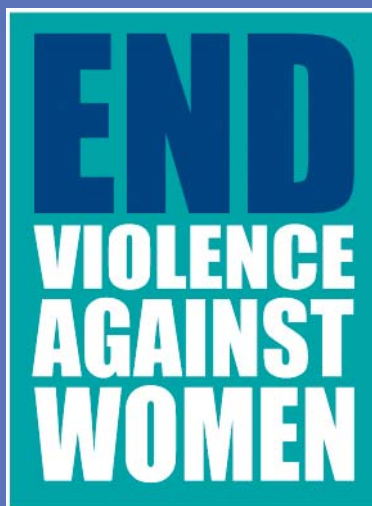


S U M M A R Y

Map of Gaps

The postcode lottery of
Violence Against Women
support services in Britain

Maddy Coy, Liz Kelly and Jo Foord



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In partnership with



This new report shows that in many parts of the country, services for women who have experienced violence are chronically under-funded or simply do not exist. Women shouldn't be subjected to this postcode lottery.

This is a call to action for everybody who cares about this issue, and a firm reminder for those in local and national government with the power to make a difference: Urgent effort must be made to provide funding and support to ensure that all women can get help whenever they need it and wherever they live.

I hope that the stark statistics in today's report, and the inspiring stories from parts of the country that serve as a beacon – stories reminding us how adequate support can and has made such a difference – will serve as a wake-up call and inspire others to take action. But for those councils among the worst offenders who continue to ignore the dire need to shore up services and plug the gaps, we also have a stark reminder. The Commission is ready and willing to use its enforcement powers..

Trevor Phillips

Chair of Equality and Human Rights Commission,
January 2009

Government is conscious that service provision is not what it should be in all parts of the country ... our aim must be appropriate services and enough of them.

Vera Baird

Solicitor General
Keynote at Refuge 6th Annual Domestic Violence
Conference, London, 25 November 2008

Map of Gaps

A postcode lottery for women who experience violence

Each year, three million women in Britain experience rape, domestic violence, stalking or other violence. Many millions more are dealing with abuse experienced in the past.

In 2007, the inaugural Map of Gaps report documented for the first time the uneven distribution of specialised services in Britain to help women who experience violence, such as Rape Crisis Centres and refuges.

The findings were alarming: over one-third of local authorities had no specialised service provision at all. Only a minority had a range of services, defined as nine or more, covering different forms of violence (domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, trafficking, female genital mutilation and forced marriage) and types of support (safe shelter, advocacy, advice and self-help).

One year on, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the End Violence Against Women Campaign (EVAW) have repeated this research. We wanted to see if the picture of support has changed for the millions of women who are forced to deal with the legacies of violence.

But once again, victims face a regional postcode lottery, and in large parts of Britain provision is scarce or non-existent. Many women are still left without the local support they need:

- The latest picture shows that over one in four local authorities in Britain have no specialised support services at all.
- Ethnic minority women are especially poorly served. Of the 408 local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales, just one in 10 have a specialised service for ethnic minority women. These services are uniquely suited to deal with women facing a very particular set of circumstances, for example those fleeing forced marriage or female genital mutilation, or those with insecure immigration status.
- Glasgow has the best provision in Britain, whereas the East and South East of England are particularly poorly served.

- Of the new services opened in 2008, 60% were in statutory sector. These services, like Sexual Assault Referral Centres and Specialist Domestic Violence Courts respond to recent incidents reported to the criminal justice system. While welcome, the majority of women still choose not to report the violence to the police. Thus statutory provision only deals with a tiny fraction of the problem.

- Levels of provision in the voluntary sector, which provides a wider range of services for all women, including those who do not seek help until years after they have experienced violence, have remained static or in some cases diminished. A survey of Rape Crisis England and Wales centres conducted for this year's report indicated that almost a quarter (24.1%) face closure this financial year and almost two-fifths (39.3%) fear closure in 2009/10 because of a lack of funding.

- The United Nations has called for the UK to do far more to support women who are victims of violence. Violence against women costs the NHS an estimated £1.2 billion a year for physical injuries and £176 million for mental health support. Despite this the Department of Health has made no significant investment in specialised violence against women services nor made reference to violence against women in its departmental strategic plans.

- In Scotland, the Government has extended provision through a national Violence Against Women Fund for over five years. But this fund is now at risk since responsibility for funding violence against women services has been devolved to local authorities, a system which, as this year's report shows, isn't working for victims of violence in the rest of Britain.

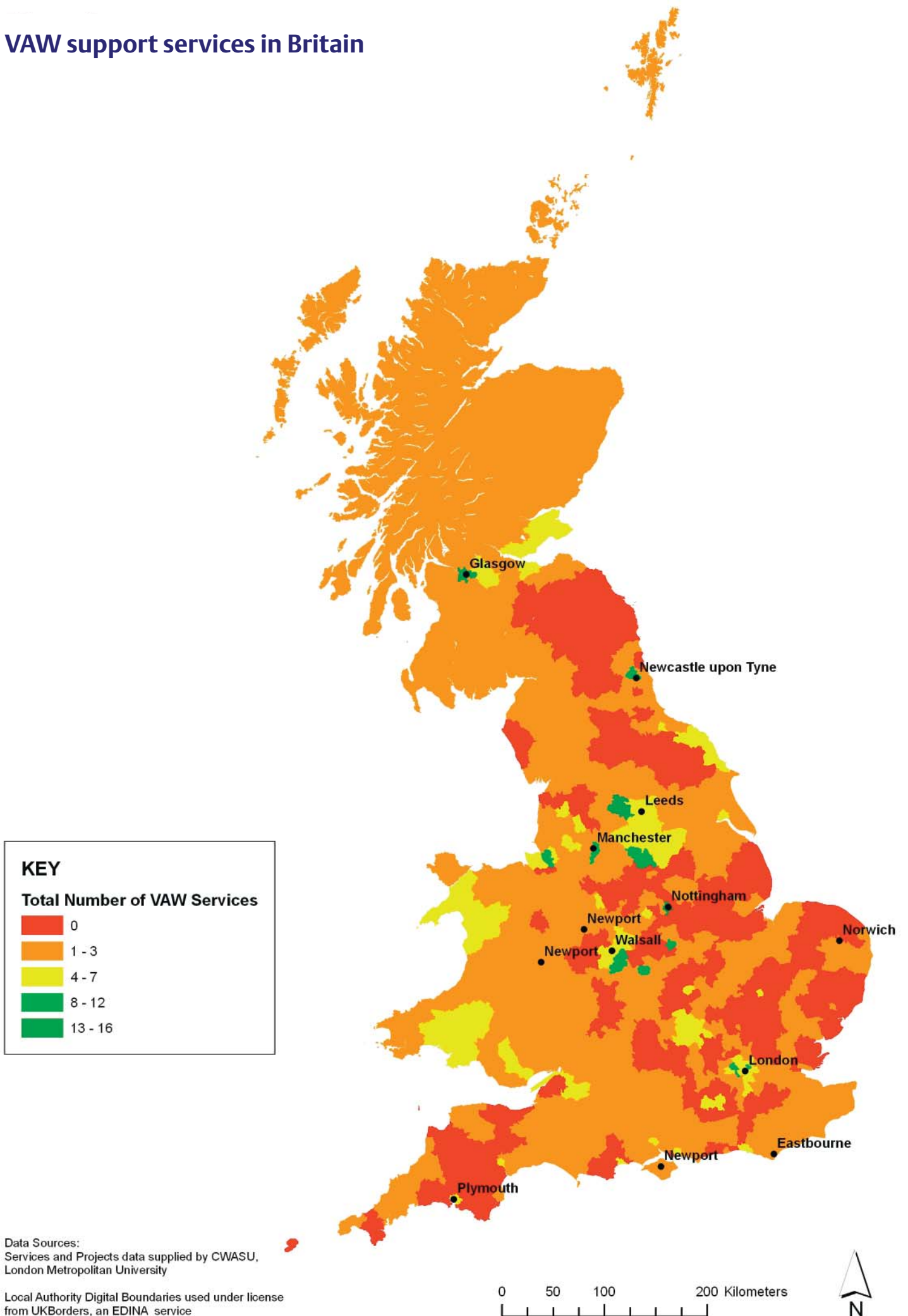
Rosie's story

Rosie lived in a small town in England. Never a confident person, Rosie was dominated by her partner who criticised everything she did. He was also violent.

Social services got involved when the nursery had concerns about their three small children. They spent two years working with the family, and knew about the domestic violence, but focused on the care of the children. Rosie attended parenting classes but her partner Ian never did. Rosie co-operated and tried to create a stable home for her children. Social services applied for a care order on the children, and it was only when Rosie had a solicitor that the question of the violence to her was addressed.

An expert opinion for the court recommended that the couple separate whilst Ian attended a perpetrator programme and Rosie got support from a specialist domestic violence project. But neither was available locally. The children were taken into care.

VAW support services in Britain



The funding crisis faced by local women's services means not only that current gaps are unlikely to be filled but also that there will be a significant decline in services to respond to women's needs. Women who suffer violence will find themselves increasingly alone. The overall impact that will have on their health and wellbeing is immeasurable.

Why do women need specialised services?

Specialised services are, in the main, run by voluntary sector organisations and include: Rape Crisis Centres, refuges, domestic violence outreach projects, services for ethnic minority women, support for trafficked women and women in prostitution.

Some important services are located in the statutory sector, such as Sexual Assault Referral Centres and clinics dealing with female genital mutilation. While they provide valuable services, they are less common and may have limits placed on the range of services they provide. Generic statutory services – such as social services, housing departments and the police – have very specific remits and lack expertise in providing the support women need.

Women are most commonly abused by someone they know, often on multiple occasions and with sexualised elements. Each of these aspects of violence against women serves as a deterrent to telling

others, let alone making an official report. And these impediments are enhanced for women from black and ethnic minority and refugee communities, disabled women and older women. Specialised voluntary sector services have provided safe spaces in which women have been able to:

- overcome shame and stigma;
- talk about their experiences without fear; be believed and respected;

Support for women in Glasgow

Women who are raped or abused in Glasgow have much better support – from both voluntary and statutory organisations - than anywhere else in Britain. For the 250,000 women who live in the city, there is a range of services meaning that women who have been trafficked can get to a place of safety, survivors of childhood sexual abuse have someone who understands their needs and there is support through the court process for victims of domestic abuse if they choose to report to the police. It is however recognised that given the prevalence of violence against women there is still a need to expand provision.

In contrast, many other British towns and cities have no specialised support for women at all. This stark contrast is because the Scottish Government, Glasgow City Council and partners in the city have made women's safety and well-being a priority through their commitment to addressing all forms of violence against women. Investing in women's support services pays dividends in helping women to overcome the harms of abuse and rebuild their lives. It is a model for other cities across Britain.

Ruby's story

"I am in my mid twenties and have a small son. One night while I was out with friends and family at a hotel in Newquay I was attacked by a man. He sexually assaulted me and when I fought back he knocked me to the floor and brutally stamped on my face and body causing serious injury. I needed reconstructive surgery as a result of my injuries.

"The police didn't treat it as a serious sexual offence so didn't offer me a specialist police officer or a forensic medical examination and the Crown Prosecution Service has recently dropped my case for lack of evidence. The police didn't give me any information about specialist sexual violence services, but fortunately I found Cornwall Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (WRASAC) who offered me long term counselling for trauma, advice and advocacy as well as support in making a complaint to the police about their treatment of me.

"WRASAC was absolutely fantastic from day one, giving me coping strategies for my panic attacks and ongoing support to this day. Without them, I simply do not know how I would have coped – they were a much needed lifeline that came just in time."

WRASAC has been supporting women who experience sexual violence since 1996. They have received numerous awards for their work including the Home Office's Gold Star Award as an Exemplar Project. Despite this they struggle for funding and do not receive any core funding, depending instead on short-term project based funding grants.

- given the possibility to explore their options;
- seek justice;
- repair some of the harm the violence has caused and move on with their lives.

It is vital that women can seek help in safe places they know are not linked to the police, immigration or social services. Many of these specialised services have been supporting women in overcoming the violence they have experienced for over three decades.

They are essential life-lines that can take the form of listening, information and advice, advocacy, counselling, shelter, protection, self-help and support to become activists themselves. Crucially, unlike many of the statutory services, voluntary sector organisations support women who have experienced violence in the past, as well as those currently experiencing violence.

Sarjit's story

When 17 year old Sarjit fled Afghanistan, she arrived in Britain alone. She was taken in by a family who physically abused her.

She managed to escape and apply for asylum but was turned down. Sarjit was then befriended by a man at a temple and moved in with him, but after she got pregnant he became violent and abandoned her.

Fortunately, she found help at Southall Black Sisters, who found her new solicitors to make a fresh asylum application and helped her get housing and support from the national asylum support service.

Organisations like Southall Black Sisters provide a lifeline for women like Sarjit who face added barriers when they experience violence, often to do with immigration rules, as well as language or culture. Yet less than one in 10 local authorities have such services, and the few that exist often struggle to survive because they are not adequately funded.

Recommendations and conclusions

It is clear from this research that there is a crisis in the funding and provision of specialised services that support women who have suffered violence.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission and End Violence Against Women campaign call on national and local governments to take urgent action to ensure that all women have access to the full range of support they need, where and when they need it:

- National governments in Britain must, as an urgent priority, implement a national funding strategy to secure existing specialised violence against women services and help fill the gaps.
- Local authorities and other public bodies must ensure that there is dedicated funding for independent, specialised, women-only services to support women who are the victims of violence.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has the power to take legal action against those local authorities that breach their obligations under Gender Equality Duty by failing to adequately prioritise women's support services.

Some names in this document have been changed to protect identities

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