

SURVIVAL AND BEYOND

THE DOMESTIC ABUSE REPORT 2017

REPORT SUMMARY



women's aid
until women & children are safe



Authors

Sarah Davidge and Lizzie Magnusson

Research and Evaluation Team, Women's Aid

Acknowledgments

We are extremely thankful to all the domestic abuse services who have provided the vital data for this report.

We are also grateful to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for its funding contribution to Routes to Support (the UK violence against women and girls service directory run in partnership with Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland, Scottish Women's Aid and Welsh Women's Aid) and the Women's Aid Annual Survey, and for its full funding of the No Woman Turned Away (NWTa) project. Data from all of these sources contribute to this report. This report was independently researched and written by Women's Aid.

Thanks also go to the staff at Women's Aid for all their support.

Published by:

Women's Aid Federation of England

PO Box 3245, Bristol, BS2 2EH

© Women's Aid 2018

Photo credit:

Page 3: Gus Palmer

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. Over the past 40 years Women's Aid has been at the forefront of shaping and coordinating responses to domestic violence and abuse through practice. We empower survivors by keeping their voices at the heart of our work, working with and for women and children by listening to them and responding to their needs. We are a federation of over 220 organisations who provide more than 300 local lifesaving services to women and children across the country. We provide expert training, qualifications and consultancy to a range of agencies and professionals working with survivors or commissioning domestic abuse services, and award a National Quality Mark for services which meet our quality standards. Our campaigns achieve change in policy, practice and awareness, encouraging healthy relationships and helping to build a future where domestic abuse is no longer tolerated. The 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline on 0808 2000 247 (run in partnership with Refuge) and our range of online services, which include the Survivors' Forum, help hundreds of thousands of women and children every year.



Foreword

Katie Ghose
Chief Executive, Women's Aid



Domestic abuse, by its very nature, is hidden behind closed doors. This makes the production of detailed information and the unpicking of the facts behind the headlines all the more important. The more we can understand about survivors' journeys and the vital specialist support they need, the better we can identify the gaps and what changes are needed to ensure that all women are able to escape abuse and rebuild their lives.

Our Domestic Abuse Report 2017 uniquely draws upon five national data sources for the first time. Together they provide information about a range of domestic abuse services and their service users, including information from community-based services (for example, prevention work, drop-in services, advocacy services, counselling support) and from refuge services. Sustainable funding has long been a problem, but with 60% of respondents citing funding insecurity as their top challenge, we have further evidence that a sustainable long-term funding solution is vital. It must incorporate the national network of refuges we have built over the last 40 years, in order to save the lives and futures of those experiencing abuse. The report shows the full range of services women and children require, from prevention work to crisis. Right now, many services feel they have insufficient resources to offer much more than crisis support, and even then, many women are turned away because of a lack of capacity.

We also know that the women who experience abuse are all unique, and we can only truly support them by attending to their individual needs. For example, about 78% of women in refuge on our Day to Count had health support needs, over half had sustained physical injury from the domestic abuse and over a third had mental health support needs – in many cases this will be combined with other complex needs. We found that there are more children than women in refuge, with 62% of women bringing children with them, all with individual needs of their own.

Our limited services then face the challenges of supporting women into independence. Rehousing places a great deal of stress on survivors. This has a huge impact on children who are in need of a stable home environment, having already suffered trauma. All the while, we must remember that survivors are victims of crime – about two in five of those living in a refuge have had the abuse reported to the police. Support through the criminal justice system is vital if there is to be any recompense for their suffering and the perpetrator held responsible.

This report gives us the most detailed picture of service provision to date, offering us essential insights to give hope to our sector, and the hundreds of thousands of women and children who suffer abuse at the hands of violent and controlling perpetrators.



Introduction

Survival and Beyond: The Domestic Abuse Report 2017 is the new report from Women's Aid¹, the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children in England. This is the first Women's Aid report to pull together findings from all five of our major sources of data. Our annual survey 2017, which collected information from local services for women and children in England, is combined with information on service provision from the Routes to Support database between 2010 and 2017, and data from three other sources. This provides a comprehensive review of domestic abuse support services in England and the needs of women and child survivors using them.

We mainly focus on the financial year 2016/17 and results of a census day and week in July 2017 (called the Day and Week to Count). In addition, the report examines some data from previous years to draw out any trends between 2010 and 2017.

The Women's Aid data sources we use in this report are:

► **Routes to Support**², the UK violence against women and girls database of service and refuge vacancies run in partnership by Scottish Women's Aid, Welsh Women's Aid, Women's Aid Federation of England and Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland. This report includes data for England and additional data on vacancies from London refuges³ telling us about the women

accessing refuge and the instances of unsuccessful referrals for these vacancies.

► The **Women's Aid Annual Survey 2017**⁴ of domestic abuse services in England. The survey provides insight into the challenges services face throughout the year and information on the women they support from a Day and Week to Count (a census day and week). Both Routes to Support and the annual survey are part-funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

We also include data from the following sources:

► **On Track**⁵, our case management and outcomes monitoring database. On Track was launched in March 2016 and is already used by over 40 local service providers throughout England. Services contribute to a national dataset which provides information on women's experiences of abuse, support offered by services, and outcomes achieved. 11,113 cases of female clients were recorded in 2016/17.

► The **No Woman Turned Away** project, a frontline telephone based support service for women who were unable to access refuge. This project has been funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and provides us with valuable information on barriers women face when trying to flee to refuge, which has been published in our report *Nowhere to Turn*⁶.

1 Women's Aid Federation of England

2 www.womensaid.org.uk/routes-to-support

3 This data collection is supported by London Councils.

4 The Women's Aid Annual Survey is sent to all domestic abuse services in England and asks questions about the previous financial year and service use on a Day to Count (for refuge services) and Week to Count (for community-based services). Previous annual survey reports can be found at: www.womensaid.org.uk/womens-aid-annual-survey-reports

5 www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/ontrack

6 www.womensaid.org.uk/research-and-publications/nowomanturnedaway

- **The Femicide Census**, which has been developed by Karen Ingala Smith in partnership with Women's Aid, with support from Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP and Deloitte LLP. The Femicide Census is a database currently containing information on over one thousand women killed by men in England and Wales since 2009. The latest report⁷ was published in December 2017.

The key findings

- Domestic abuse services continue to support large numbers of women and children survivors and yet demand continues to exceed capacity.
- Domestic abuse survivors have a broad range of needs and access a range of service types. This may include seeking information and support from a helpline or drop in service, being referred to services such as advocacy, outreach, support groups, counselling or refuge.
- The majority of women using domestic abuse services have children (aged under 18). There were more children than women in refuge on the Day to Count (4th July 2017).
- There are particular challenges for some groups of survivors in accessing domestic abuse support, including barriers facing disabled women, black and minority ethnic women, women with no recourse to public funds, and women with high-level support needs around mental health and/or drug and alcohol use.
- Funding and sustainability are the biggest challenges reported by domestic abuse services, with funding cuts and uncertainty having a marked impact on staffing capacity. This, in turn, impacts on services' ability to support all survivors.



Section 1: Who are the service users?

Women's Aid Annual Survey 2017

- ▶ An estimated 3,557 women with 3,919 children stayed in refuge on the Day to Count (4th July 2017) across all services in England.
- ▶ An estimated 25,727 women were using community-based services in the Week to Count (3rd – 7th July 2017) across all services in England.

Domestic abuse services are supporting large numbers of women and children from a range of backgrounds. Based on answers from respondents to the Women's Aid Annual Survey 2017, we estimate that there were 3,557 women with 3,919 children staying in refuge on the Day to Count and 25,727 women using community-based services in the Week to Count across all services in England⁸. We also estimate that, over the year 2016/17, refuge services supported a total of 13,414

women with 14,353 children and 154,306 women used community-based services across all services in England.

We asked services to tell us the age range of women they are supporting. The results show that women from the under 18 and over 60 age groups appear to be under-represented in our sample of women using services. This is despite evidence from other sources showing that younger and older women experience domestic abuse at similar (or, for teenage women, higher) rates to other age groups (Blood, 2004; Femicide Census, 2016 and 2017; Mouton et al, 2004; ONS, 2017B).



Section 2: Meeting the needs of women and children

Survivors using domestic abuse services had diverse support needs (see **Chart 1**). These included needing support around housing options; criminal, civil and private law; social isolation; financial abuse and debts; needs relating to children; getting information and support about their immigration status; and accessing educational and employment opportunities.

Children

On the Day and Week to Count 2017:

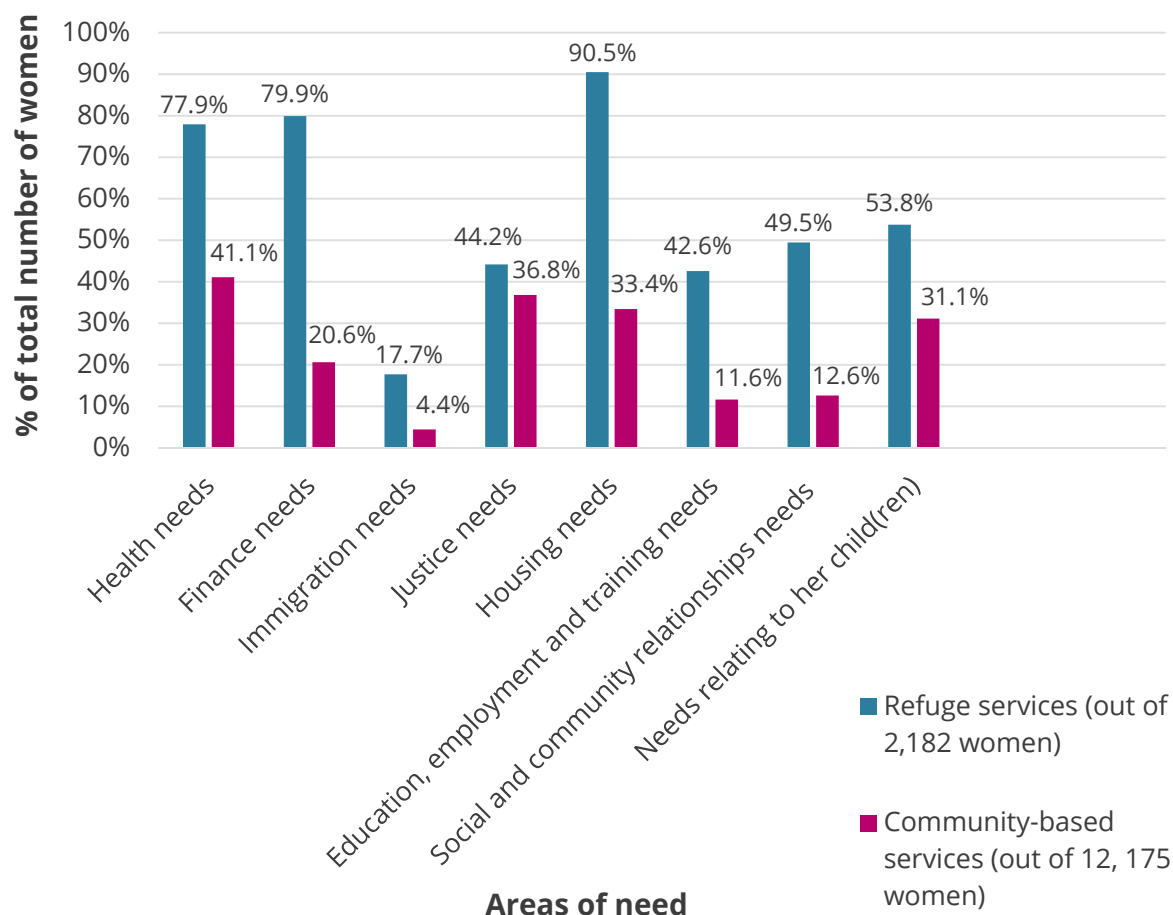
- ▶ 61.7% of women in refuge had children (aged under 18) with them.
- ▶ 59.0% of women using community-based services had children.

8 Estimates are based on responding services, see Appendix Three: Women's Aid Data Sources in the full report for details.

- ▶ There were 2,182 women and 2,336 children and young people (aged under 18) resident in refuge services.
- ▶ An estimated 4,635 children were directly supported in all community-based services during the Week to Count and an estimated further 26,034 were supported indirectly through support given to their mothers.
- ▶ 31.1% of women in community-based services and 53.8% of women in refuge services had needs related to her child(ren).

The majority of women using domestic abuse services in the Day and Week to Count had children and there were, again, more children than women resident in refuge services on the census day.

Chart 1: needs of service users during the Day and Week to Count, 2017 (Women's Aid Annual Survey 2017)



Justice

- ▶ The domestic abuse had been reported to the police for just over one quarter of the women using community-based services in the Week to Count, and just over two fifths of women resident in refuge services on the Day to Count.
- ▶ One eighth of the community-based service users and one sixth of the women resident in refuge services saw criminal sanctions or a criminal case against the perpetrator(s) of the abuse.
- ▶ One seventh of community-based service users and one fifth of refuge service residents had seen civil action against the perpetrator(s) (either ongoing or in the past), for example a non-molestation order or an occupation order.
- ▶ For one sixth of women resident in refuge services on the Day to Count and for less than one tenth of community-based service users in the Week to Count, there was, or had been, an ongoing family law case about child contact with the perpetrator(s).

Access to justice seemed to be a major issue for women using services, with most abuse going unreported and fewer women seeing criminal sanctions or a criminal case against the perpetrator(s) of the abuse. This was especially true for women using community-based services. This may in part be because refuge offers greater physical safety from the perpetrator and women in refuge may be more likely to have had contact with the police in the process of trying to leave the relationship, with abuse reported as part of that contact.

Health

- ▶ In the Day and Week to Count, 52.7% of refuge service users and 30.6% of community-based service users had sustained physical injury from the domestic abuse they had experienced.
- ▶ In the Day and Week to Count, 38.3% of women in refuge and 28.4% of women in community-based services had mental health support needs.

Our annual survey for 2017 showed that about three quarters of women (77.9%) using refuge services on the Day to Count and about two fifths of women (41.1%) using community-based services during the Week to Count had health-related needs. It is therefore concerning that 17.4% of organisations responding commented on the challenge of meeting the needs of women with complex or high-level needs including mental ill-health, long-term illness, disability and substance use.



Section 3: What are the support services meeting these needs?

Range of services

No two women take the same journey to recovery, and some may never access specialist services at all. For those who do, their journey may take them through multiple service types over different lengths of time. These may include:

- ▶ Open access interventions where no referral is needed, such as a helpline or drop in.
- ▶ Community-based support offered in the project building, the client's home or other location, such as IDVA or other advocacy service, support groups, counselling or floating support.
- ▶ Refuge and associated resettlement support.

Domestic abuse services are provided to women in a range of different circumstances, from women who are still in a relationship with the perpetrator to women who have escaped to a refuge.

There has been a net increase in some service types shown on Routes to Support over the last year and it is encouraging to see an increased number of refuge bed spaces are now available. Our report shows that, in spite of this increase, demand for all service types including refuge still exceeds capacity, and services struggle to find the resources to support all the referrals they receive. This can be the result of insufficient space at the service; one in five referrals received by refuges during 2016/17 were declined due to lack of space. It can also be the result of a combination of other

factors, including variable provision in different regions and reduced staffing cover and lack of resources limiting the support that services can offer. For example, services may not be able to offer sufficient levels of support for women with complex needs or fund support for women with no recourse to public funds. Women accessing provision with children and seeking support for those children can also be a factor. Although we have shown that the majority of women accessing services had children, evidence shows that services may not be resourced to support them. Our report shows that, just 66.3% of refuges and 33.9% of other service types have children's workers and less than half of vacancies posted in 2016/17 could take a woman with two children, which reduces to less than one in five for a woman with three children. Multiple factors come together to determine whether women are able to access the support they need and our report explores demand and accessibility of services in more detail.

Demand

Community-based services⁹

- ▶ Respondents were unable to accept 22,656 referrals to community-based services during the year. We estimate that this figure would increase to 51,322 across all services listed on Routes to Support (not just survey respondents).
- ▶ 24.3% of referrals in 2016/17 to community-based services responding to the annual survey were declined.

9 Estimates are based on responding services, see Appendix 3 of the main report for detail. Respondents were 154 entries with refuge and 131 with community-based services.

Refuge space¹⁰

- ▶ Respondents were unable to accept 11,867 referrals¹¹ to refuge services during the year. We estimate that this figure would increase to 21,729 across all services listed on Routes to Support (not just survey respondents).
- ▶ 60.0% of referrals in 2016/17 to refuge services responding to the annual survey were declined, one in five of all referrals were declined due to lack of space in the refuge.

Demand for all service types continues to be higher than capacity. The number of survivors looking for support in these services is likely to be greater than these 'referrals declined' figures indicate. Some women are unaware that there are support services available, and more still may not have been referred because there was no appropriate service available for their needs at the time of looking. Refuge services receive referrals to vacancies posted on Routes to Support, therefore our figures do not include those women who are seeking refuge but are not referred as no suitable vacancies exist. In the words of one survey respondent:

Most challenging issue in 2016/17

"The figures do not give a full picture of the number of referrals, as if there are no vacant rooms,

we will show as 'full' on the Routes to Support website, thus we will not be contacted by those searching through those means."

Accessibility

- ▶ The number of spaces in refuges stating they offer 24 hour staffing cover fell from 796 to 737 during 2016/17 (Routes to Support).
- ▶ Only 66.3% of refuges and 33.9% of community-based services have children's workers (Routes to Support).
- ▶ Less than one in five vacancies posted to Routes to Support during 2016/17 could take a woman with three children.
- ▶ During 2016/17, only 766 out of 11,187 vacancies (5.4%) posted on Routes to Support would consider applications from women with no recourse to public funds.
- ▶ Of the 11,187 vacancies listed on Routes to Support during 2016/17, only 1.7% (n=195) had wheelchair access.
- ▶ In England, on 1st May 2017, there were 28 refuge services run specifically for black and minority ethnic (BME) women, though not all of these were run by BME women.

To fully understand availability we need to look at how accessible services are for all women who need their support, and identify barriers to that access. Complex needs, children, age, lack of recourse to public funds and disability can be additional challenges for women seeking to access domestic violence and abuse services. There are gaps in provision and resources which create barriers for women facing these additional challenges which are compounded by dwindling resources and a reduced capacity to meet demand.

¹⁰ See Footnote 9.

¹¹ Instances of referral is not equal to the number of women unable to access space, it may include more than one instance of a woman being referred before going on to find refuge on a later attempt. It does not include women looking for space but finding no vacancies listed on Routes to Support. Also, some refuges did not record these data for each vacancy.

New data in this report show that refuge room sizes are shrinking and that availability of refuge vacancies is limited by the number of children a woman is fleeing with, her access to public funds and whether she has complex needs or disabilities. Vacancies are also limited by where in the country a woman needs to go to feel safe and our report also looks at the geographical journeys women make to seek refuge.

National network of refuges

- ▶ 68.4% of women resident in refuge on the Day to Count had come from a different local authority area whereas only 7.5% of services users in community-based services had crossed local authority boundaries. (Women's Aid Annual Survey 2017)
- ▶ The majority of women placed in a refuge in London during 2016/17 came from another London borough (67.1%), followed by outside of London (21.1%) (see **Chart 2**).¹² (Routes to Support, 2016, 2017)

Women accessing refuge will usually need to leave their local authority area to be safe

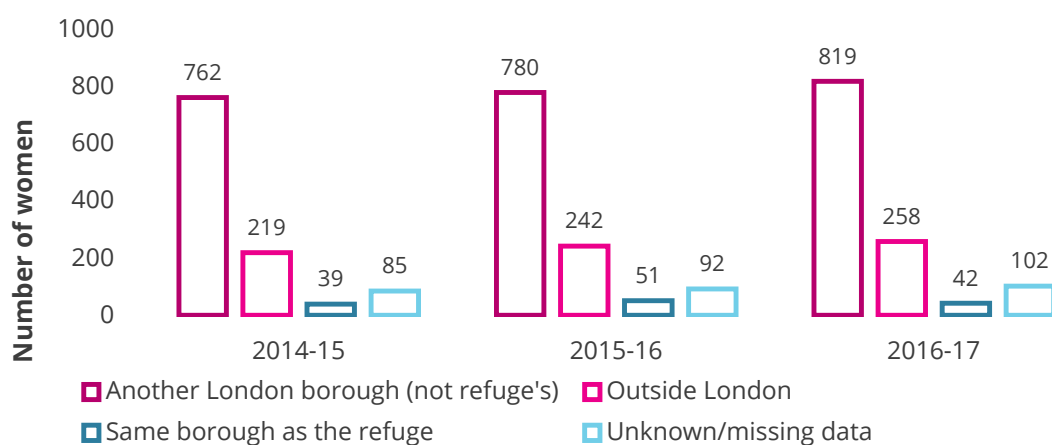
and need access to a national network. It is therefore vital that refuge services are accessible on this basis with specialist provision, such as support for complex needs and wheelchair accessible spaces available across all regions.

Sustainability

- ▶ 46.3% (57 services of 123) of organisations¹³ responding to the Women's Aid Annual Survey 2017 were running an area of work without dedicated funding during 2016/17.
- ▶ 20.3% (n=24) received 25% or less of their funding from the local authority.
- ▶ Funding was the most commonly mentioned theme to a question about the service's biggest challenge in 2016/17, with 60.0% of respondents to this annual survey question (69 responses) giving comments about funding challenges.

Crisis funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government for refuge services has enabled some services to stay open in the short term. However, whilst crisis funding is valuable, by its very nature it does

Chart 2: Where women lived before being placed in refuge in London (Routes to Support)



¹² As these data only show women placed in refuge within the greater London area they do not reflect the numbers of women leaving London to seek refuge.

¹³ Responding to the question about running an area of service without dedicated funding.

not create a climate of sustainability. We have already seen that demand for all services continues to exceed capacity, yet information on funding shows that the domestic abuse service provision currently available extends beyond those services commissioned by local authorities.

For refuge services, increasing bed spaces alone has not enabled services to fully meet the needs of women and children seeking their

support as shown by the number of referrals they are unable to accept.

Domestic abuse services are facing a funding and sustainability crisis. Insecurity of contracts and funding challenges continue to provide a major barrier to services being able to provide the level of support and services needed by women and their children. Some services are even running some parts of the service without dedicated funding.



Conclusion

We see from our evidence that geography, women and children's needs and the level of support available are not matching up to give every woman and child the support they need. The network of provision currently available stretches beyond that being commissioned by local authorities, yet demand for all service types continues to be higher than capacity. Some services report seeing an increase in referrals from women with complex needs, which are being met with reduced rather than increased resources. Our annual survey responses show that services face continuing uncertainty of funding and are even running entire areas of their service without dedicated funding whilst they look for a more sustainable future.

This climate of uncertainty must be addressed in order to ensure the survival of this vital national network of local services, so that they are able to continue providing effective support to women and children experiencing domestic abuse. There needs to

be sufficient, sustainable resources available for these services to remove barriers to access and continue offering a full range of refuge, community-based, open access and therapeutic services. This must happen in conjunction with redoubled efforts on early intervention and prevention. Only then will we finally be able to meet demand and ensure all women and children experiencing domestic abuse can access the right support to ensure their own survival and, beyond that, their recovery.