

SAFETY 4 SISTERS

Migrant Women's Rights
to Safety Pilot Project

2016



Safety4Sisters North West works towards securing greater protection, safety and support for women who have experienced gender based violence and who have no recourse to public funds or state benefits.

Thanks to the volunteers who donated their time, energy and commitment to support the work – Dudu, Amina, Naima, Einas, Borona, Malvina, Zhila, Joyce, Alice, and Lynne.

Thanks to Safety4Sisters Management Group and to the Women Asylum Seekers Together Management Group. Thanks to all those who donated money, clothes, toys and toiletries.

In addition we would like to thank some key agencies and individuals who supported and advised on our work - Southall Black Sisters, Europia, Cheetham Hill Advice Centre, Platform for the International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants, Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit, Asylum Support Housing Advice, Lynda Shentall, Nicola Masri from Rights of Women, Farheen Anwar from the Women's Domestic Abuse Helpline Manchester, Dawn Redshaw Director of Salford Women's Aid, Kathy Cosgrove from Platt Halpern, Magdalen Bartlett from Afrocats, Maria Ruben filmmaker and Hayat Chikhi for supporting the banner making workshops.

Much gratitude also goes to Joyce Challis, Ursula Sharma and Dr Khatidja Chantler for their support in the proofreading of the report and to Aidan Cassidy for his data processing work.

Thanks to our funders, The Big Lottery, LUSH and Sports Relief Local Communities, who supported the project and publication costs of this report.

This report was written by Vicky Marsh and Sandhya Sharma from Safety4Sisters with contributions from Amina Stithi and Joyce Challis.



This report is dedicated to all the women who contributed to the Safety4Sisters pilot project and for their courage and bravery in sharing their experiences

Contents

Abbreviations 2

Foreword 3

No Recourse to Public Funds 6

Women’s Immigration Status at Point of Referral 7

Gender Based Violence 8

 - Human Rights and Violence Against Women 9

Development of the Migrant Women’s Rights to Safety Pilot Project 10

 - The Pilot Project 11

Women’s Profiles 12

Group Work 14

Volunteers 27

Support and Advocacy Work 29

Case Histories 30

Problems and Barriers to Support 38

Short Case Studies 41

Outcomes 42

Recommendations for Best Practice 46

Conclusions 48

Appendix – list of agencies used during the pilot project 50

Abbreviations

S4S	Safety4Sisters
WAST	Women Asylum Seekers Together
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
GBV	Gender Based Violence
MWRS	Migrant Women's Rights to Safety
HBV	Honour Based Violence
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
ILR	Indefinite Leave to Remain
DLR	Discretionary Leave to Remain
LLR	Limited Leave to Remain
HR	Human Rights
EEA	European Economic Area
DDV concession	Destitution Domestic Violence Concession
NASS	National Asylum Support Service
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
NRPF	No Recourse to Public Funds

Foreword

Violence can be a reason for women to migrate, it can be the cause of their irregular status and it can be a consequence of their unprotected status

All women have the right to live a life free of violence. This is an inalienable right and a basic human right. It is a right to which all measures to address gender-based violence refer. There should always be help for those who need it. To overcome challenges to report violence, measures have been introduced to ensure women are treated in a secure and appropriate manner. Informed and impartial safeguards have been developed to tackle impunity and bring perpetrators to justice. Women are told by the state that violence against them is wrong and that they will receive immediate assistance and support when making the difficult decision to come forward.

This right and the protections that accompany these measures have however been denied and continue to be denied to a certain group of women. As with most groups whose right to civil liberties are questioned, women with insecure immigration status are excluded, disadvantaged, and increasingly unpopular. Their existence in society has been considered illegitimate, and accordingly the violence against them has been disregarded and their access to justice and safety denied.

Safety4Sisters was established to address women with no recourse to public funds and their consequent exclusion from the most basic rights of safety and protection. Additionally, we wanted to highlight the human rights failures that accompany their attempts to live free from gender based violence. Both our campaigning based work and our direct project delivery has been directed at assisting migrant women to obtain effective protection and to support them in asserting their fundamental human rights and freedoms. We believe that all women should have access to support whilst seeking safety, not least safe accommodation, welfare and legal advice and representation, regardless of their immigration status. The 61 women who were supported during the 10-month pilot Migrant Women's Rights to Safety Project had come to the UK for various reasons, some as spouses, some as student's others, as asylum seekers or as dependants on their partner's entry applications. Some women were over stayers and others were EEA nationals. All the women were victims of crime.

Safety4Sisters exists within an increasingly austere and precarious context, overshadowed by immigration rules that govern the UK which are designed and implemented to create a hostile and harsh environment for those seeking entry, work, settlement and asylum. Successive immigration measures, introduced by a progression of governments, have tightened up entry requirements and conditions of stay within the UK. Situated in this context, women who are subject to immigration control who are also experiencing violence are penalised, criminalised and framed largely outside of the acknowledged best practice standards for dealing with violence against women and girls and the scope of human rights.

Despite this, some small but important wins have been realised. The introduction of the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDV) in 2012, after a sustained campaign led by Southall Black Sisters and others from the black and minority ethnic (BME) Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) groups, now affords some relief to women on

spousal visas whose relationships have broken down because of domestic abuse. However, there is concern that the DDV only refers to women with spousal visas and crucially it does not extend to all women with insecure immigration status, many of whose experiences are reflected in this report.

The political environment in which women inhabit is fraught with tension as strategies and inequitable, often contradictory policies intersect, compounding the experience of violence. It is a political landscape with its own ecology where concepts of nationality and citizenship, rights and entitlements, deserving and undeserving victims are shaped, reshaped, dismantled and justified by ever changing ideological persuasions. These narratives permeate, often subtly, into individual and collective thought, largely to the detriment of women's liberty. Unless we de-link immigration status from women's experience of violence, we can only provide a partial safety net at best.

Inconsistent and paradoxical state responses form part of this landscape. On the one hand women are encouraged to report violence to the authorities, on the other women are invariably penalized even criminalized for doing so when they have irregular immigration status.

More recently the toxicity of the immigration discourse has come roaring to the fore as the politics of Brexit and the EU referendum took hold throughout the summer of 2016, intensifying the hostile and suspicious climate towards migrant communities and providing a relentless and menacing backdrop to our work. The rise of the far right and xenophobic/anti-immigrant movements across Europe and their traction within our own mainstream politics, policies and media has significantly added to the fragility of migrant women's location with regards their relationship to both society and state. This has played out in the lives of women where they have often found their own immigration status scrutinised before, or instead of, the perpetrators' abusive behaviour or where concepts of the 'foreigner' and 'other' govern how we respond to women seeking support. In addition, many key services, including specialist refuge services, may refuse or delay assistance because they are uncertain of what women are entitled to and the consequences of aiding someone whose eligibility to public funds is subject to scrutiny.

Running alongside these bleak developments, we are witnessing what we perceive to be the greatest and most disturbing threat to women's safety in recent history. The decimation of the specialist women's refuge, disproportionately affecting BME specialist VAWG groups, in conjunction with the ruthless erosion and dismantling of the legal aid sector, under the guise of austerity, is having a colossal effect on women's ability to access justice, safety, security and exercise their most basic human rights. The pace and scale of the successive funding cuts across the board and over consecutive governments has made a dire situation far more terrifying, where women and children's lives, particularly those without access to state benefits, are at stake and where the very fabric of the protective safeguards afforded to societies most vulnerable are being destroyed. The current government's deliberation on the repeal of the Human Rights Act is causing tremors across the sector. What space remains in the vacuum left behind is quickly being exploited, and with encouragement from the state, by larger, profit driven groups such as larger housing associations/organisations and religiously based organisations. Regrettably, many of these bodies have little knowledge, experience or desire in delivering the high quality, sensitive and empowerment based approaches that have been pioneered by the feminist movement, particularly those from BME feminists' activists and campaigners.

Given the climate of austerity, the closure of specialist services, depletion of legal aid, and the purchase gained from the

anti-immigrant discourse, we are in dangerous waters. Migrant women's positioning at the intersection of race, gender and class politics tells us something very important about the damaging impact of these combined forces on vulnerable women. Unsurprisingly, resisting, navigating, mitigating and surviving these forces comes at great cost to women's mental and physical health.

This report documents and exposes the realities of vulnerable migrant women living at societies margins and shines a light on the experiences of those bearing the brunt of the current politically austere time. It also is a stark reminder of the universality of patriarchy and its complicity with state immigration strategies as well as the threats to women's liberty as specialist Violence Against Women and Girls organisations, primarily those supporting BME women, fall by the wayside.

As we write, Theresa May has just delivered her leader's speech at the Conservative conference, setting out her vision to reinforce drastic measures to cut immigration and curtailing migrants' rights in the UK as well as dismantling the Human Rights Act. This is a grave indication of an even bleaker future yet to come.

Without galvanising a new energy and coherent counter narrative, women, their children and all of us involved in upholding and defending social justice, equality and protection for the most vulnerable, have much to lose. The feminist movement has proud traditions of campaigning and activism to emancipate all women. It's imperative that we remind ourselves of these traditions as there is still so much work to done, particularly for those from the most marginalised communities. To strip a certain group of women from their fundamental liberty to live free from violence is inhumane, unethical and immoral. As a society, we must act together to ensure safety and protection for all women and so that we leave no woman behind.

What are public funds ?

A person with NRPF is only prohibited from accessing SPECIFIED PUBLIC FUNDS including;

- Income-based jobseeker's allowance
- income support
- child tax credit
- working tax credit
- a social fund payment
- child benefit
- housing benefit
- council tax benefit
- state pension credit
- attendance allowance
- severe disablement allowance
- carer's allowance
- disability living allowance
- an allocation of local authority housing
- local authority homelessness assistance

What are not public funds ?

All other publically funded services can be accessed by a person with NRPF (sometimes with other eligibility criteria) These services include:

- Work related contributory welfare benefits
- Housing association tenancy
- Social services assistance
- Education and student finance
- NHS treatment**
- Legal aid
- Child maintenance
- Free school meals
- Government funded childcare
- Concessionary travel passes

NHS treatment

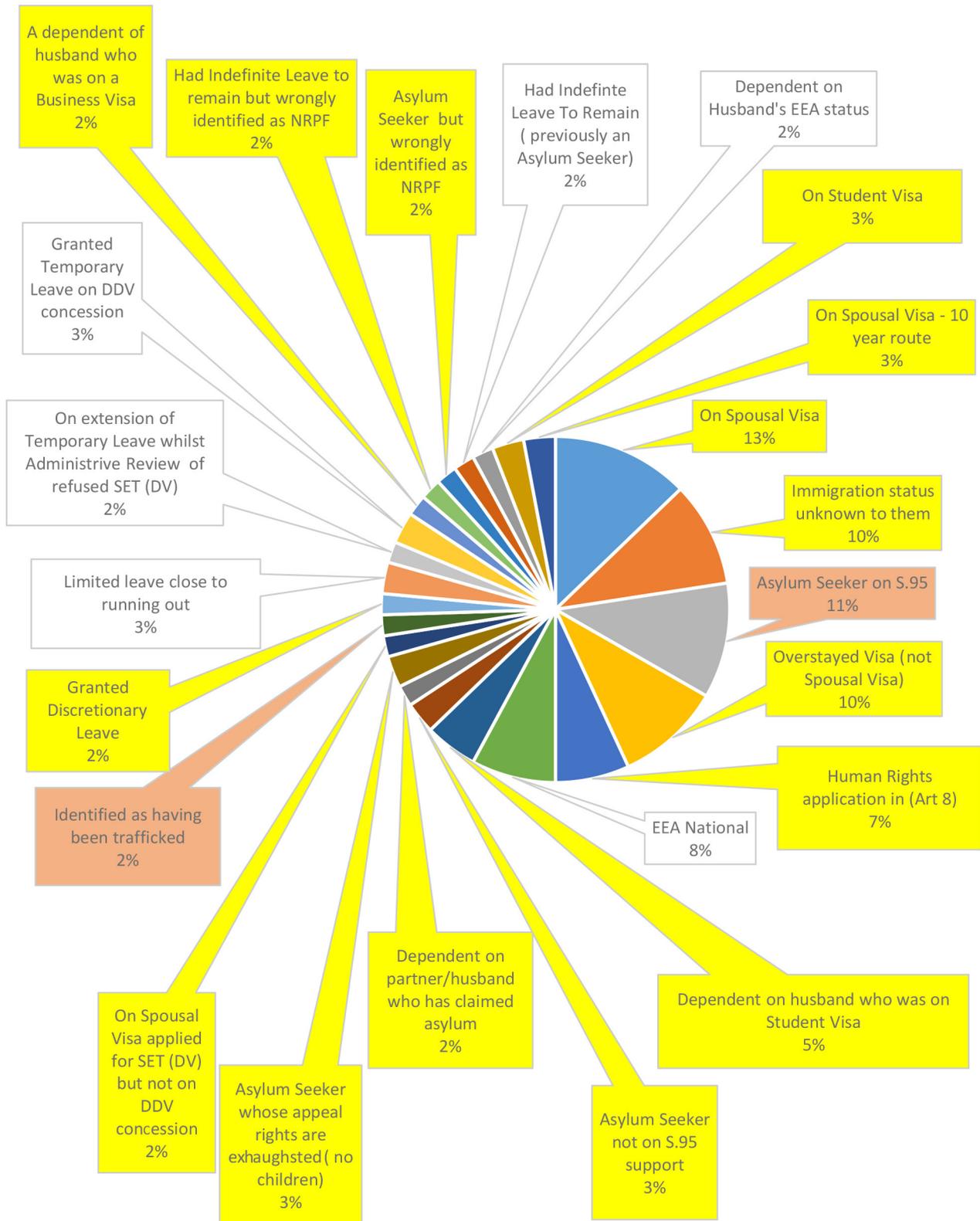
People with NRPF can access NHS healthcare. Some types of healthcare are free to everyone but some may be charged to certain people. Services delivered by a GP, treatment for certain contagious diseases, and accident and emergency treatment at a hospital, are free of charge to everyone. Hospital treatment is chargeable to certain people. In England, people with NRPF who will need to pay for treatment include:

- Visa overstayers
- Entrants who don't declare themselves to the Home Office
- Refused asylum seeking families who are not in receipt of asylum support from the Home Office
- Refused asylum seeking adults who are not in receipt of asylum support from the Home Office or accommodation from a local authority under Part 1 of the Care Act 2014

Such people will be required to pay before hospital treatment can be provided, unless such treatment is immediately necessary or urgent.

People applying for limited leave to remain in the UK are now required to pay the Immigration Health Charge to gain access to hospital treatment. Failure to pay an NHS debt of £1000 or more could lead to an immigration application being refused.

Women’s Immigration Status and NRPF at Point of Referral



- Yellow highlight = the woman had/ or was told she had “no recourse to public funds”
- Pink Highlight = women had Home Office support

Gender Based Violence

The Gender based violence women experienced

The terms Gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women are used interchangeably as most violence against women is gender-based, and most GBV is inflicted by men on women and girls. Gender-based violence is a major public health, equality and human rights issue, which cuts across the whole of society. It encompasses a spectrum of abuse including domestic abuse, childhood sexual abuse, rape and sexual assault, sexual harassment, dowry related abuse, stalking, bride price, commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and so-called 'honour' crimes.

Two terms commonly used to refer to violence experienced by women in the household are domestic violence/abuse and intimate partner violence/abuse.

Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to, the following: coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence), psychological and/or emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, harassment, stalking and online or digital abuse.

The women that Safety4Sisters worked with often experienced multiple forms of GBV over their lifetimes by various perpetrators. For example - a Nigerian woman who had experienced FGM as a child, emotional abuse and neglect from her father who contacted traffickers who took her to UK and then she was sexually and physically abused by the family who used her as a domestic slave.

Human Rights and Violence Against Women

Comprehensive legislation is fundamental for an effective and coordinated response to violence against women. States have clear obligations under international law to enact, implement and monitor legislation addressing all forms of violence against women. Over the past two decades, many States have adopted or revised legislation on violence against women. However, significant gaps remain. Many States still do not have in place legislative provisions that specifically address violence against women and, even where legislation exists, it is often limited in scope and coverage, or is not enforced.

UN definition of Violence Against Women

“Any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation”.

Violence Against Women and Human Rights

Violence against women is both a consequence of and a cause of inequality between men and women. As well as being a health problem of epidemic proportions, it's also a human rights problem of equal severity. Depending on the violation, it can deprive a woman of:

- her right to health and physical and mental integrity
- her right to be free from torture, inhuman and degrading treatment
- her right to life.

While those rights are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there are also specific pieces of international legislation that protect a woman's right to be free from violence.

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, defines how UN member states should define and act to stop discrimination against women.

In 1993 the General Assembly passed the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) which recognised that violence against women is widespread, that it comes from a historically unequal relationship between men and women, and that it is used as a mechanism to subordinate women. The Declaration called on UN member states to work together to eliminate an issue that is ‘an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace’.

It is the state's responsibility to protect women living there from violence, even domestic abuse behind closed doors. Authorities can do this by creating national laws that criminalise violent acts against women, providing support services like safe sheltered accommodation for women who need it, and making sure that crimes can be reported and prosecuted safely and justly. Sometimes this includes working to change public attitudes and challenging the stigma around reporting violent crime.

Development of the Migrant Women's Rights to Safety Pilot Project

Safety4Sisters North West (S4S) is a small, committed group of Manchester based feminist and anti-racist activists who have roots and histories within the violence against women and girls (VAWG) and anti-deportation movements and campaigns. Initially Safety4Sisters was established in 2009 as a campaigning organisation by volunteers within the Women's Domestic Violence Helpline Manchester, who were witnessing the extraordinary barriers and discriminatory practices that women with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) faced when seeking access to support, safety and protection.

As activists within and across various liberation movements, S4S members were aware of the draconian and punitive response from the state by way of immigration measures and policies and how this plays out in migrant women's lives. What we were shocked by was how these policies and accompanying messages were being absorbed into wider society, including state and non-state services, resulting in a normalised culture of disbelief and routine denial of fundamental rights.

Far from being afforded the protections and security associated with victims of crimes, the no recourse to the public purse requirement created an impasse in the help seeking process. The fact that women could not access emergency safe accommodation or welfare services was at odds with safeguarding policies and practice of dealing with victims of domestic and sexual abuse.

From the outset, Safety4Sisters set up networking meetings with relevant statutory and voluntary agencies to try and improve responses and outcomes in relation to migrant women's safety. Early meetings revealed a lack of knowledge and awareness of both the issues women faced and the rights they were entitled to.

In particular, we felt that there was a failure to take into account the specific conditions and experiences migrant women face including racism, familial and community control, state inaction/ collusion in the abuse, and the stigma, shame and repercussions women faced when daring to leave the violence.

In 2011 Safety4Sisters produced a Manchester City Council funded, practitioner's guide for working with migrant, NRPF women experiencing domestic abuse (updated 2013) and organized a training conference at Manchester University. However, we were still hearing and speaking to migrant women who continued to receive piecemeal, inconsistent, and on occasions, downright dangerous responses from state and non-state agencies.

"We just have humiliations, a lack of dignity, we are powerless next to the man abusing you." - Group member

At the same time, we were aware that there was an increase in the numbers of migrant women with no recourse to public funds coming forward in the Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST) drop in. The women all disclosed gender based violence and in most cases from perpetrators in the UK. As a self-help group, WAST offered a safe, trusted space but lacked the resources to provide specialist services needed – This, in part, informed our thinking as an organisation and was one of reasons we wanted to develop our campaigning work to address this issue by way of direct work with women in the form of a pilot project.

Whilst there is little research or data available to reflect both the numbers of women affected and their specific and extra-ordinary impediments, Southall Black Sisters, a London based campaigning organisation, estimated that approximately 600 women were victims of domestic abuse and on spousal visas. This number does not include migrant women on other visas and those who are undocumented which Safety4Sisters had contact with via WAST. Consequently, in 2014 we began recording women's

complex difficulties in accessing services. Safety4Sisters collated anonymous records of 20 women. Through this recording and detailing of women's experiences and the barriers they faced, we were able to evidence the gravitas of the problem and the scope of women's support needs, (whilst also feeling compelled to offer volunteer support throughout this period). Through the preliminary critique and analysis of women's experiences, we identified the need to develop, in collaboration with the women, a new, more responsive and effective, model of working within an empowering, holistic, rights based, needs led framework. On 25th November 2016 with some small start-up funding, Safety4Sisters set up the Migrant Women's Rights to Safety Project to begin direct delivery with women and explore creatively how we could develop our initial ideas.

The Migrant Women's Right to Safety pilot project set out to record and evidence

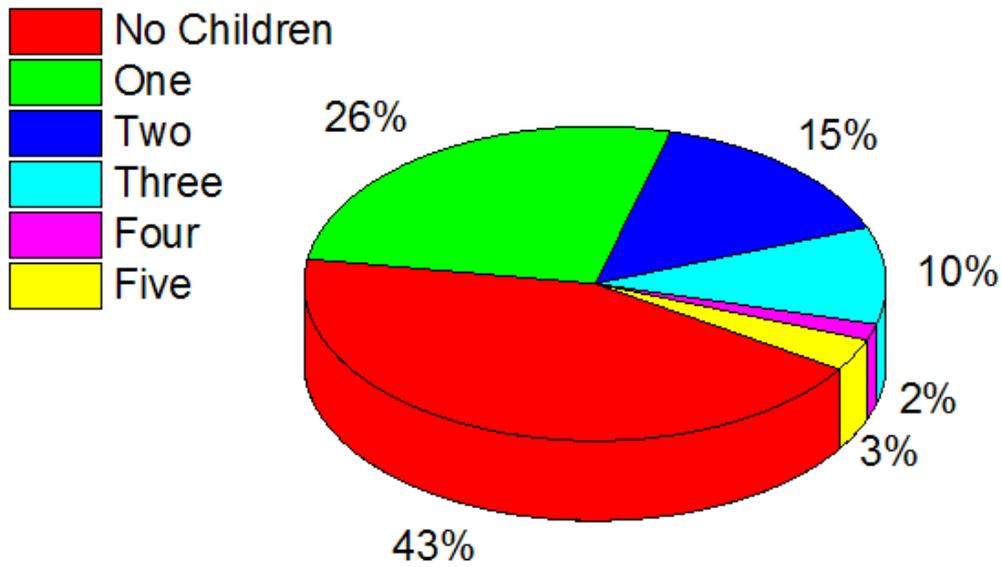
the main problems migrant women were facing when they experienced gender based violence and faced immigration issues, identifying both the women and the barriers they faced. Safety4Sisters were committed to supporting women who came forward or were referred into the project (within restricted resource limits) and to exploring and developing best practise in this support work using a needs- led, rights based, anti-racist, feminist framework. Workers and volunteers offered practical and emotional support, both individual one to one advice and advocacy running alongside a support group on a weekly basis. Individual work was often crisis /emergency support and follow up work throughout the week.

From this work, we have monitored 61 women's experiences and outcomes for their lives that emerged in the 10 months of the pilot project. From this we were able to draw up recommendations for best practise for all services supporting migrant women experiencing domestic abuse, including services that see themselves working only on the periphery of domestic abuse service

delivery or immigration support services.

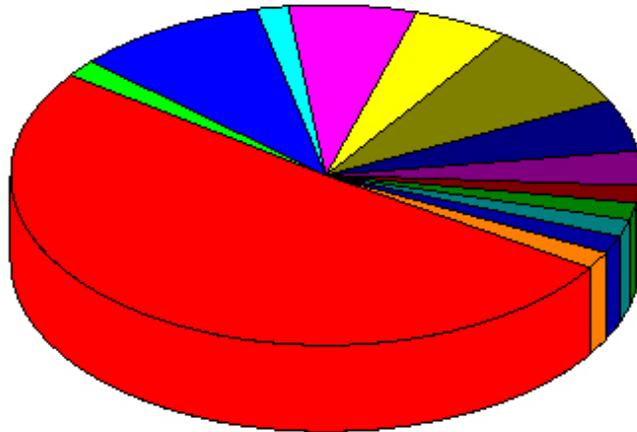
Safety4Sisters has also been able to outline a model framework for a specialist service such as the Migrant Women's Rights to Safety project, which we hope can be developed with long term funding in the future either as a separate specialist or/and as a specialist black minority ethnic and refugee service within an existing women's support and safety service.

Number of children



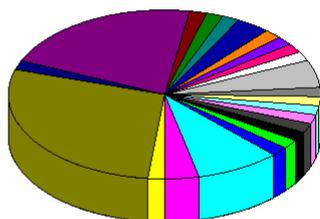
Area referred from

- Manchester
- London
- Oldham
- Blackburn
- Tameside
- Rochdale
- Salford
- Wigan
- Stockport
- St Helens
- Pendle
- Liverpool
- Bolton
- Nelson Lancs

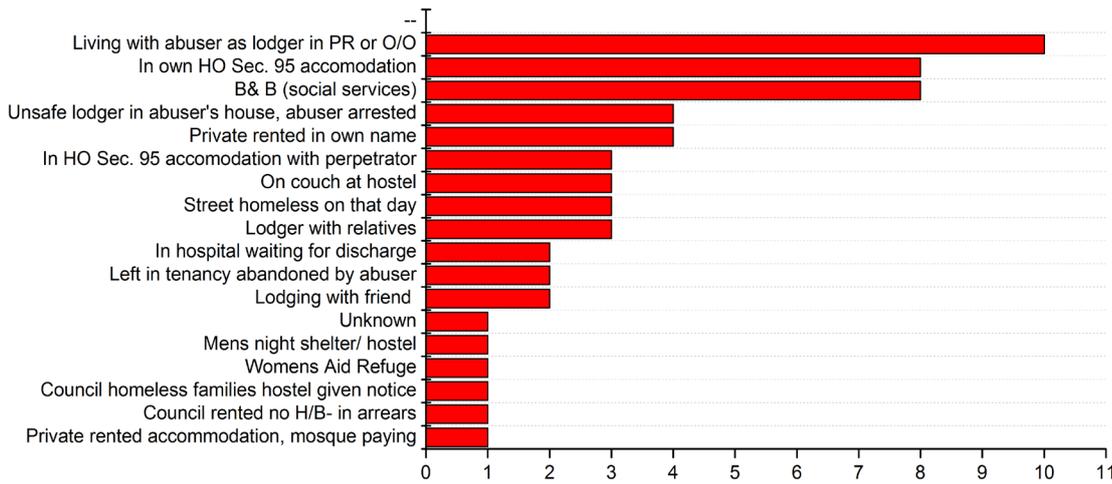


Country of origin

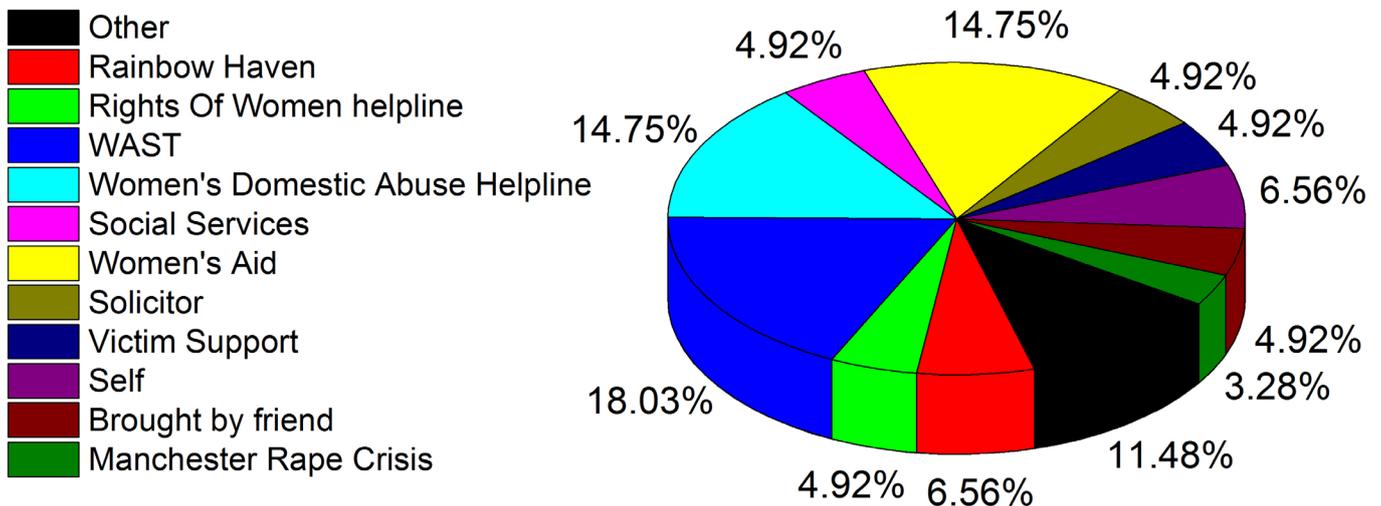
- Zimbabwean
- Sudanese
- Bangladeshi
- Algerian
- Iranian
- Pakistani
- Slovakian
- Nigerian
- Egyptian
- Russian
- Jamaican
- Iraqi
- Albanian
- Chinese
- Polish
- Iranian
- Eritrean
- Dutch
- Indian
- Cuban
- Sri Lankan
- SA
- Ethiopian



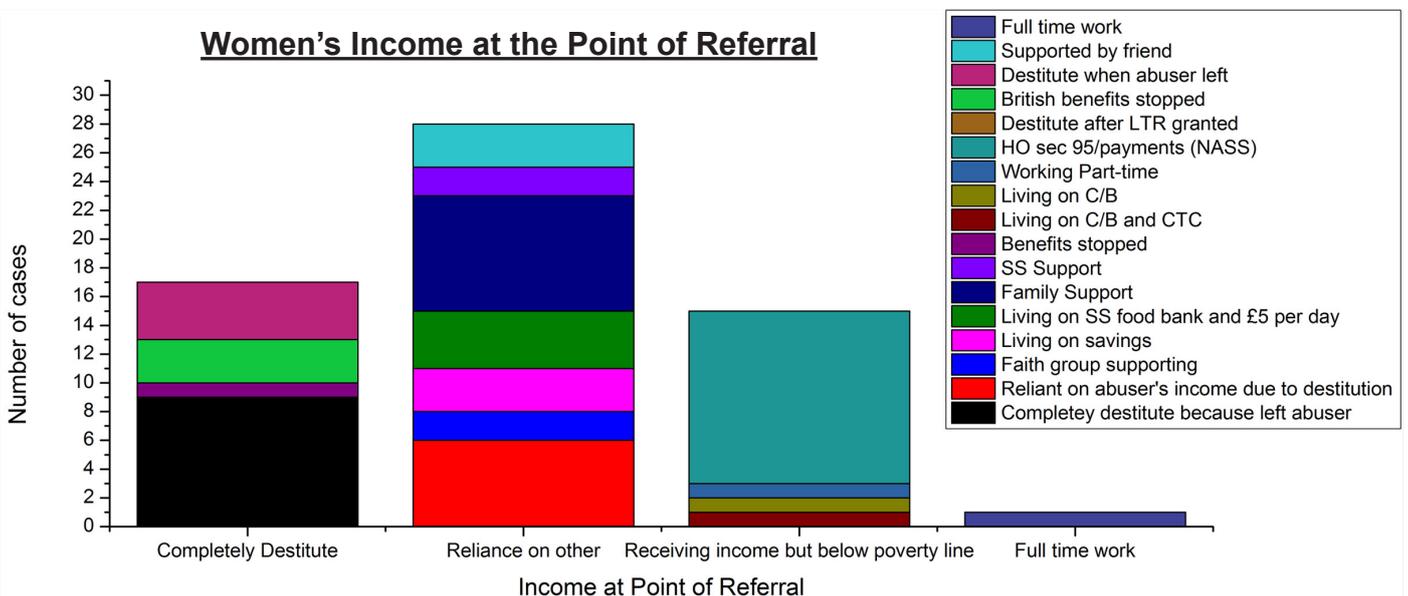
Housing situation at point of referral



Referral Origin



Women's Income at the Point of Referral



Group Work – A powerful site of resistance

“People need to know how we cry here, how we talk here and how we can tell the story because all the time immigration thinks our story isn’t real, it’s fiction and we are liars- but we are real and we need to tell our story”. – Group member

Safety4Sisters’ early discussions about the development of the Migrant Women’s Rights to Safety project focussed on the need to establish a group work component. We felt that it was important for women to give voice to their experiences of both the impact of domestic abuse and simultaneously, the compounding effects of immigration control. The central desire was to create a space through which women could speak about the experiences of being located at the intersection of these systemic forms of control. We had heard from women, through our campaigning work, that some approaches to working with women survivors of abuse weren’t able to effectively articulate or acknowledge the specific experiences of race, migration and immigration control. Women also told us that immigration/migrant support services didn’t adequately reflect on the dynamics of gender based abuse. We wanted to find ways in which women could express both.

We believed that to deliver a service of best use to women, we would need to offer both individual advice and advocacy work in conjunction with a more collective group support enabling women to talk about both their specific experiences but also to create spaces where they could share these and support other women in similar situations. We had also seen the powerful nature of group support through the Women Asylum Seekers Together model, that women themselves have the power to develop mutual solidarity to support each other. As an organisation, we clearly recognised that our role within this was to create a physically supportive environment in a trusted place within which to establish, support and resource the group.

From the outset, we also knew that in order for women with insecure immigration living in poverty to access the project it was essential to provide travel costs for all women as an absolute bare minimum. In addition to the breakfast and hot lunch that were available, women would also have access to phone, internet and administrative resources as well as essential sanitary towels, toiletries and nappies for the children.

Our initial plans were to create the space for a weekly support group for women working alongside the advice and advocacy casework where both sources of support would increase women’s ability to find safety away from violence. We also wanted to give women access to professionals from other agencies to train women up on keys issues such as the law, health and women’s rights.

As a feminist and anti-racist organisation, the group was underpinned by some central beliefs and principles of working with women survivors of domestic abuse. Safety4Sisters understood that systemic global gender inequality and the subjugation of women are part and parcel of the post colonial and patriarchal project. We knew that family, community, state, culture and religion were all sites for women’s continued oppression and marginalisation universally and that these were inherently interwoven and heightened by experiences of race, racism and migration that further pathologised women. This broader social context of marginalisation encourages the dynamics of ‘othering’ to take place. By virtue of women’s race, insecure immigration status and consequent inability to access public funds, and coming to the attention of services providers, women were frequently seen as the ‘outsider’ and ‘not one of us’. The prism of immigration was used to determine agency responses, and time and again denied women equitable access to safety, health, legal and welfare redress at points of crisis.

Consequently, our model drew from this Safety4Sisters collective experience and roots in Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) organisations, including specialist Black

and minority ethnic (BME) women's groups, and upheld certain key principles such as the necessity for a woman only space where women could name the violence and were fundamentally believed and where their immigration status was not a barrier to accessing our services. We also knew that confidentiality and non-judgmental approaches to our work were crucial as well as a deep commitment to learn from women survivors about how to progress the model and our understanding.

The model also needed to have a built-in fluidity to absorb the fluctuations and movement that accompany working with women, who by virtue of domestic violence and being subject to immigration control, are often in transitional states. This transition state was evident both in regards to their variable immigration status and subsequent entitlements but also in a more concrete way as they experience moving from violence to face insecurity possibly having to live in exploitative conditions as a result of destitution. For many women, moving from violence was too risky and precarious to consider as an option. This was particularly felt by women whose immigration status was derived from or dependent on staying with their abuser. For other women, they found that they were under enormous pressures from family and wider community to remain or return to violent relationships. Some of the women who have been trafficked by prostitution gangs with domestic and transnational networks have faced elevated degrees of threats if they were to be found. The commonality for all group participants was that of the overpowering and disruptive impact of state immigration control over their lives and ability to leave, recover from and stay safe from violence.

The overwhelming numbers of women expressing feelings of isolation, mental stress, depression and suicidal feelings were an altogether harsh reminder of the impact and prevalence of violence against women.

“We just have humiliations, a lack of dignity; we are powerless next to the man abusing you.” - Group member

Indisputably, this group of women includes some of the most marginalised, isolated and disenfranchised in our society both as individuals and within policy arenas.

Safety4Sisters also knew that for women living within abusive relationships, having a safe warm, comforting place to meet was an essential space to simply rest. One woman with multiple sclerosis regularly slept when she came for the group meeting. The exhaustion she felt was unquestionably acknowledged and understood by all – this was about self-care at its most basic form. For many women with children it was an important place where their children could receive some caring interaction and some affection which was sorely missing in their lives. For others, it was simply time out from the constant burden of having to survive in painful, terrorising and controlling environments and the grinding poverty they had to endure.

The group was supported and facilitated by a volunteer group worker who was a member of the Safety4Sisters core management team and she was reinforced by a team of other volunteers who provided critical support in the smooth running of the day. Their roles included - cooking for the group, washing up and tidying, delivering the warm up yoga exercises before group discussion, helping administer the travel costs, support in donations collection, interpreting for individual women, helping collect women's stories and feedback as well as support for children. In total, we had 9 volunteers over the 10-month period, the majority of whom were migrant women survivors. The volunteer group worker was in constant communication with the sessional project worker to ensure there was flexibility between the individual casework and the group work. It also ensured that new women that the project worker had previously seen could be welcomed into the group.

During the lifetime of the pilot project, we delivered 40 sessions with 39 women supported. The average number of women participating at each session was 12. Women

who attended came from Iraq, Iran, India, Pakistan, Cuba, Algeria, Zimbabwe, Albanian, Poland, Uganda, South Africa, Eritrea, Bangladesh, Jamaica and Nigeria.

Many women had been in the country for many years, some were new to the UK. En route to the UK some women had come via various other countries, including via Europe.

In addition to regular sessions, Safety4Sisters arranged for key agencies/individuals to deliver specialist workshop sessions for the group including -

1. Rights of Women – women, immigration and rights entitlement
2. Kathy Cosgrove – women and family law
3. Lynda Shentall – women, violence and HIV
4. WDVH – women and domestic abuse.

In January 2016, we began delivery of the women's group. The first session was attended by 2 women but by June 2016 we had over 32 women and 11 children attending the group. The rapid escalation in numbers of women attending meant that we were increasingly unable to deliver a sustained and coordinated approach to the group. The need was desperately clear but with so many women accessing the group we were finding it difficult to manage. To this end, the group worker volunteer and part time Safety4Sisters sessional worker had to take stock and revise our planning. Many women who came to the group had no recourse to public funds and were experiencing abuse in the UK, whilst others were part of the asylum process had experienced abuse outside the UK and were coming via the WAST group. We felt that in order to best meet the needs of women we needed to create separate spaces for each community of women. As a result, we decided to hold two groups:

1. Weekly support via the Women's Group for women with no recourse to public funds or asylum seekers who were experiencing abuse in the UK
2. Monthly group support for women who were part of the asylum process who had experienced abuse outside the

UK and had support from WAST.

Due to funding and staff capacity, we were unable to deliver both groups on a weekly basis. This was a particularly difficult decision to make as we were acutely aware that all the women who we saw were in need of specialist support to address their experiences of violence. It is our hope that as part of our development and funding opportunities, we are able to address this.

Principles of working

The group was based on some key values that were embedded into the wider project design -

Self-empowerment

We fundamentally believed that, notwithstanding the deeply traumatic situations that women were in, they were the experts in their own sources of existence, resistance and survival. Creating the unique conditions of a trusted women only space away from violence, family and state surveillance, women were able to find ways in which to articulate the pain and distress that they were living through and find support through each other.

“I don't want to be a burden on the UK. I want to stand up, I want to do a job, I want a respectful life. I want to show to all the men that we can do anything – women are not weak” - Group member

This space also offered a place where they were treated with dignity and respect and as citizens. Women talked frequently about feeling that they were not seen as human beings either by family or external agencies. Being treated as 'illegal' was an all too frequent experience that women spoke of and which acted as a powerful deterrent to asserting their rights and engaging with wider society.

“The Police told me - you are illegal so we can't do anything for you” - Group member

It also acted as a label that had profound effects on women's' sense of self value and self-worth intensifying

the threatening messages that violent partners/families had already employed as a means to control women and keep them from leaving. Time and again, women reported that as part of the pattern of violence, abusers would constantly state that they were worth nothing, threaten that the authorities would deport them and remove their children if they reported the violence. By positioning women as outsiders and non-citizens, abusers as well as state authorities were able to maintain power over women.

Collective voices

The group provided a space for women to find the similarities and shared experiences and help shape their collective voice. Being from such marginal locations in terms of state and familial support, many women had few instances of or spaces to receive encouragement or comfort.

The power that arose from the shared experience within the group was palpable. Women described finding a mutual and unified strength within the group, something that they rarely had access to outside of the space. As one Iranian woman said ...

“Sharing our stories is like medicine – the pain briefly stops”

This solidarity was a unique feature of the pilot, allowing women a truly empathic and encouraging environment to speak about their lived realities and make connections building on the commonalities. As new women moved into the group, existing members gave them time and space to voice their emotions, trauma, distress and fears. Through the collective support and encouragement, women began to disclose experiences, often for the first time, without fear of judgement or repercussion. For many women, this was an extremely powerful experience and one which had a lasting effect.

“At first I was in the group and I don’t want to see anyone, I didn’t want to talk or even be there but now I love to be here and see everything and slowly little by little I am able to tell you all my story and share what is happening for me.” - Group member

Because women were able to drop in and out of the group, there was no compulsion or mandate to participate at this level and indeed women could move out of the space for time out, engage in different activities, use the phone and internet facilities or speak individually with the volunteers aside from the group. The group participants recognised intuitively that for some women, sometimes, speaking about the impact of violence was too distressing and too raw. We also recognised that the group was a space for women who felt ready to engage with sharing their emotional distress, which was not a choice some women were able to make at first.

“At first I felt pressure to talk but I realised that everyone is facing the same problems. It’s hard to listen, sometimes I can’t and I have to get out of the group. Sometimes it’s so difficult but I can talk now; I know it’s a safe space. Every time I feel happy, I came from very far away but I feel really happy here. I didn’t even trust my Dr(doctor) before and I didn’t trust anyone, that’s why I couldn’t speak in the first meetings” - Group member

Common themes

Social exclusion and isolation

Due to the spectrum and continuum of violence suffered (sometimes in both country of origin, as part of the migrant journey and in the UK), women arrived at our offices in severe distress and intensely fearful. Invariably women had been isolated and socially excluded from support networks, friends and family and crucially from safety and domestic/sexual abuse support organisations. Many women did not speak English and had little knowledge of UK state, legal and community based functions. Some of the women had been trafficked by prostitution gangs with domestic and transnational networks, other as domestic slaves. Women were mostly terrified of seeking help from authorities for fear of not being believed, being returned to abuse, or of facing destitution or deportation. In many cases women had been told by perpetrators and

their extended families that they are not entitled to police protection, access to justice and other emergency services. Many women who had been subject to police violence or indifference in their countries of origin were already fearful of their involvement in their lives. Perpetrators routinely used the woman's insecure immigration status as part of the abuse tactics as a means to prevent them from leaving the abuse, creating a climate of fear and ultimately locking women into the violence. These tactics were not just employed within the UK context but, terrifyingly, had an international reach.

“My husband says that if (I) go back to Iran, he will arrange for intelligence services to pick me up from the airport, put me in prison and torture me – all this is possible in Iran. All the time I am scared outside, someone could come and hurt me”. - Group member

The group provided a place of safety for women to meet collectively and share their experiences (often for the first time) including disclosures of rape and sexual abuse. Women were encouraged to attend as we felt that if women accessed the group early, we felt more able to mitigate against long term mental health issues and distress.

Indeed, one of the defining features of the group was that it acted as a hub for women who were isolated emotionally and physically. Because some women were entering the asylum process as a means of regularising their status, they had been placed in Home Office dispersed accommodation. This meant a further upheaval and detachment as they moved often from communities that they knew to unknown dispersal sites, many of which were outside of Manchester in areas where there was little access to culturally familiar resources and communities. Women talked about the perceived and actual racism that they experienced and the increased isolation that limited finances and mental distress caused. Many women throughout the pilot project were moving away from violence into safe refuge, B&B or alternative accommodation as a direct result of Safety4Sisters advocacy interventions. The group acted as a central hub accompanying them throughout the physical,

emotional and psychological disruption that goes with the territory of leaving violence. Having access to safe and trusted places as migrant women was something that was greatly valued and increased their ability to form friendships and supportive relationships across distance and locations.

Migrant women leaving gender based violence were left isolated and often excluded not just from immediate family but from wider familial networks and community. They were often leaving not only one abuser but a whole collection of links, networks, relationships and associations. This placed them in difficult situations as they had limited ability to link back into support services and as women often new to the UK, were simply unaware of what support was in fact available.

Impact of violence

Having a space to simply talk about the violence was fundamental to women using our service. As migrant women, they necessarily came from a variety of ethnic minority communities but had similar experiences of gender based violence and harmful traditional practices and the additional problems that they, as migrant women, faced. The commonalities included religious and cultural pressures, immigration and asylum issues, suicide, self-harm and mental distress, racism and discrimination, poverty, children's issues and financial hardship. The culmination of these factors created an intensely hostile environment that impacted on women's ability to leave violence.

“How can you, you don't just leave as you are not in control of the situation. I just tried to make myself small and invisible so that he didn't need me or see me as a human being anymore and so he would leave me alone – I found that this was the most effective way” - Group member

The kinds of violence reported were across the gender based violence spectrum including domestic and sexual violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, dowry abuse and Honour Based Violence. Abusers included; partners, family, extended family members, prostitution gang members, state officials, people whom they had considered friends and strangers.

Given that women's immigration status often took priority in agency responses to their experience of violence, we ensured that women had a chance to talk about the impact of violence both separately and in conjunction with immigration control. This was an important feature of the group as the overemphasis on a woman's status in the UK denied her the spaces and ability to give testimony to the violence or explore options to bring perpetrators to justice.

“My first violent partner – I had to go into a women's refuge but he called the Home Office to say I was illegal so that I wouldn't get my residence. The state ignores or criminalises you and the men know you are vulnerable so they can exploit you” - Group member

This was particularly important for women who had accessed state agencies, had been removed from the violence but had felt abandoned by those agencies as they were considered no longer at danger of abuse and were left to 'get on' with their lives. Immediate and sustained support around the domestic violence is a recognised best practice standard for all women experiencing domestic abuse, however, many women felt that this was not provided for them. One woman had been supported by Social Services to leave the violence and get private rented accommodation. After the initial support, she felt abandoned as the Social Worker had dealt with the crisis and she had her own finances to support herself, and so the Social Worker closed her case. She spoke about the desperate isolation she felt as she was left to get on with her life without any specialist domestic and sexual violence support in place.

Women reported high rates of mental health problems with

disproportionate rates of suicide and self-harm as well as high levels of isolation, imprisonment within the home, and feelings of low self-esteem, rejection and shame as one group member stated -

“It was around this time that my husband kept pestering me on the phone by text. I was under a lot of pressure by his texts and threats. I wasn't important to him at all. He even allowed his brother to beat me up. I felt stuck. I took an overdose”

This group of women faced multiple barriers to escaping abuse, including language, strong cultural and religious pressures (such as 'shame' and 'honour') which 'outcast' women, multiple perpetrators in extended families and communities, lack of knowledge of their rights and services, refusal to intervene by agencies due to 'cultural sensitivity,' lack of specialist provision, racism and living within deprived areas. Having no recourse to public funds significantly curtailed their ability to seek safety and protection and heightened the existing sense of terror and fear. On three occasions women were referred to Accident and Emergency during the group as a result of suicidal ideation.

Many of the women subject to forced marriage had had no control over who, where, when or how they married leaving them with significant mental distress -

“The time I signed that paper (marriage documents) I didn't know what it was, I didn't know what marriage was, if I had known that it would be this I would have shouted out NO!” - Group member

Others spoke about the horrific impact of rape and sexual abuse on their lives

“He forced me that night to have sex with him. I was crying throughout. I felt terrible” - Group member

Many women had faced collusion and abuse from their own family or by their husbands’ extended family.

“I went upstairs. He put me on the bed and put his hand around my neck and said he would kill me. His father, mother and sister were there but they did not do anything”

- Group member

Women spoke about being made to take on the burden of shame as a result of leaving the violence, whether they had been physically ejected from the house or forced to leave as a result of the abuse. All the women spoke about the terror they would face if they were returned to their country of origin as there would be no chance to recover or establish their lives as they would face further abuse by family members. In the cases of the women who had been trafficked by prostitution gangs, there was considerable risk that they would be found, their children removed from them and forced back into the trafficking cycle.

“Going back to my country will be like dying” - Group member

Women with disabilities were particularly vulnerable to abuse. One woman with five children who was both epileptic and had visual and mobility impairments was dependent on her abusive husband’s asylum claim. She could not leave him and when her husband had previously been taken into detention, she had asked Social Services for support. Their response was to take her children into care, rather than to provide her with the support, as they felt she couldn’t care for them. This traumatic experience badly affected her mental health and as a result, when her husband was eventually released and the children were returned to her, she found that despite the renewed violence, she would rather face that than risk asking for Social Services support again.

One woman spoke about how she had been treated as if in her culture (Pakistani) the domestic abuse was to be

expected.

“If I could change one thing it would be for all these services; social, police, housing, job centre, legal aid, to stop thinking that domestic violence is the norm in different cultures. That domestic violence is to be expected in different cultures, and so they don’t help the victims in the same way” - Group member

In fact, this particular woman had been told by the police officer, whom she had reported the abuse to, that she had expected too much from her husband and marriage inferring that the abuse was to be tolerated. She was told by this police officer that as her husband was British he had more rights than her. In this case, the domestic abuse was normalised as part of her ‘cultural’ experience as a woman of Muslim Pakistani heritage and that this was an expected part of her upbringing and background. This experience was echoed by some of the other women from other minority communities. They spoke about how many agencies didn’t respond effectively to their disclosures of abuse or who had made dangerous assumptions that somehow the women, by virtue of ethnicity and as migrants from abroad, were less damaged as a result because they were more used to the violence. This response was not only an example of racialized notions of ethnic communities as inherently ‘backward’ but gives rise to further dangerous messages that impact on migrant women’s lives and how the abuse is framed. Firstly, it wrongly assumes that minority communities are homogenous and that women survivors of abuse have not contested, challenged and taken a stand against the violence. In this way, they have failed to see women’s agency and the fact that they have actively resisted the violence. In fact, many women from the group had made numerous attempts to disclose the violence to outside agencies taking great risks in doing so. The courage that this takes is rarely acknowledged. Secondly, by minimising the trauma felt by minority migrant women, they are effectively denying women the basic emergency support required but also the

additional assistance they require as members of minority communities and in relation to the immigration status. Given that they are exceptionally marginalised from mainstream service provision with often complex cases, it appears that agencies would need to offer more support rather than less. Thirdly, it places women from migrant communities outside of mainstream and standardised frameworks as ‘others’ who have less entitlement (or need) to protections, safety and justice as victims of violence. The effect on women was serious often leading to long term psychological distress with women coming to the attention of agencies at points of mental health crisis. Women also talked about how minimisation of the violence created a culture of distrust in disclosing to external agencies.

The physical health of women attending the group was poor. Whatever physical damage had occurred at the hands of abusers was exacerbated by the prolonged states of mental stress, poverty and insecurity they had been subject to. One Bangladeshi woman, who had been thrown down the stairs in a brutally violent attack by her husband, sustained injuries to her foot. She had been taken in by a relative of her husband but had not been taken to see a doctor until Safety4Sisters could find her safe accommodation. This was significantly delayed as the refuges that we contacted would not take her in because of her insecure immigration status. It was only after two months during which time Safety4Sisters has established that she had a right to put in a further application under the DDV concession and therefore some short-term housing and welfare benefits, that she was able to get any medical attention.

“My health problems have been created, exacerbated by the violence. The stress of not having rights in this country have made my physical health so bad that I can barely get through the day without much pain. My mental health has suffered so badly” - Group member

Being Believed

A recurrent issue that women raised time and again through the group was the impact of not being believed by agencies, particularly by the immigration authorities. Naturally this created immense distress and frustration for women whose applications and accounts of their experiences were dependent on unknown decision makers finding them credible and “genuine”. Established best practice models of working with women who have experienced gender based violence are based on principles of believing their accounts and their assessment of threat. This is in stark contrast to the culture of disbelief employed by immigration control decision making. This incongruence was profoundly problematic and difficult for women as their very experiences and character were being scrutinised and doubted, seemingly with impunity. It caused considerable psychological distress and women spoke about feeling powerless to influence the might of the Home Office

This powerlessness echoed and intensified their experiences of gender based violence. It reiterated the messages employed by violent partners/ families of women; particularly those who had experienced violence in the UK – that no one would believe them, that they had no rights, that no-one cared and that if they spoke about the abuse the state would deport/remove them from the UK.

Women spoke about the relentless surveillance they felt under in their everyday lives with regards to their immigration status and the constant anxiety it created for them. They spoke about how immigration control had influence and presence in all aspects of their lives. For example, an Iraqi woman who had her documents, which stated that she had Indefinite Leave to Remain, was scrutinised by Adult Education staff. She said she was quizzed very publicly about the authenticity of her documents.

“I have ILR and that’s also a problem – I went to the Adult Education Centre to apply to do an interpreting course. I gave my ID that I had ILR and they said who gave you this and why? I said that this is not your business but he said how did you enter this country? They asked me too many questions” - Group member

This was a common experience for many women, the subjection of immigration status to constant examination and judgement became part and parcel of their everyday life. Having to constantly explain their existence was exhausting.

An incredibly important role that the group played within this was its unconditional and total commitment to believing women. Their experiences were validated and acknowledged, their fears, anger, frustration and distress were authenticated.

Children

Many women had children who were not in full time education and who would accompany their mothers to the group as there was no other option than to bring them. Women described a stark lack of finances as they could simply not afford to pay for child care and many had lost child support networks and resources as a result of the violence. This presented as a major obstacle to women being able to effectively participate in the group. Over holiday time many more children were present, increasing the levels of volunteer and children’s activity resourcing we had to undertake.

“We don’t have our mum and dad here so we have to become each other’s family” - Group member

A major concern for the organisation was the fact that we were unable to find somewhere away from the group meeting space for children to use. Due to the fact that the children were often very young, we could not take them outside their mother’s sight. This created many problems and concerns for Safety4Sisters as we were acutely aware of the impact on children of hearing their mothers talk

about the violence. We also knew that most of the children had been subject to the violence themselves, had seen violence against their mother and overheard the abuse. We knew that children had been uprooted from schools, nurseries, friendships and family members as a result of the violence and subsequent transfer of accommodation with few people to engage with and talk to about their feelings. Younger children were acutely aware that their mothers were distressed with no way to understand why. Children would sit with their mothers, wipe their tears, others cried or displayed behavioural issues when their mothers spoke. It was a difficult situation and one which we were unable to address effectively within the pilot project duration. We did, however, create a specific space for children to use, at the side of the group meeting space with volunteers who carried out play activities with them whilst the group took place. This was not satisfactory and there was real concern that the children were affected by hearing distressing issues being raised but volunteers tried to provide as wide a range of play opportunities to the children. Those that were older were reassured that their mothers were safe in this group and that all the other women in the group are supporting them and looking after them. As part of our commitment to reflexive learning from the pilot project we aim to ensure that we look at better ways to address children’s needs within our work. We urgently want to obtain funding and resources to provide separate dedicated children’s spaces, specialist crèche workers with an understanding of the impact and experience of domestic violence, immigration and subsequent upheaval on children and to explore possible avenues to engage with children and young people’s mental health support as part of our work.

“When you are in my situation you are invisible, you are nobody and have no rights” - Group member

Detachment

An issue that was raised at many group sessions was the impact of migration and violence on women’s ability to maintain relationships with family and extended family

members, children, friends, colleagues and networks. Being far from support at points of crisis, brought up emotions of loss, sadness and grief. Some women had left relationships other than that with the main abuser that were now difficult to maintain due to a variety of reasons. These included lack of money to maintain phone contact, inability to maintain contact as this might place family members in jeopardy (particularly when the woman's family members were interconnected with the abuser and his family as in the case of cousin marriages). Women also feared that the family would stigmatize or pressure them to return to the violence or that the family would report back to the abuser. Issues such as these are inextricably linked with, powerful notions of shame and honour that are used as a tool to keep control over women and can lead to women not wanting family members to know about their situation or to be worried about the reality of their lives. Some women talked about the impact of their leaving abusive husbands would have on their younger siblings fearing that they would be "tainted" by their shame. The loss of family and relationships whether as a consequence of a calculated technique used by abusers to displace women from sources of support or arising from the transition from violence further disrupted their sense of self and identity. It increased women's vulnerability as they were forcibly positioned outside of and physically distanced from important social and kinship networks, intensifying feelings of loneliness and isolation.

"They were blaming me twenty-four hours every day. They used to lock me up in the house. They said I was not allowed out of the house without his permission. I was not even allowed contact with my own family. They had disconnected the internet and the land line both" - Group

member

For many women who had left the abuse, this was the first time they had actually had to live and manage on their own and many had little knowledge of the UK systems or of the English language. For one young Bangladeshi woman, even navigating the travel systems and understanding the currency was difficult. To this end, the group became an important source of safe connection, re-attachment,

integration back into to society and familiarity with others.

In some incredibly disturbing cases, women had been forced to leave their children in their countries of origin because of poverty, the disruption of violence and living in highly patriarchal countries where women had little parental authority or control over their entitlement to raise children on their own. One woman had had to leave her two children in Jamaica as a direct means of securing her own survival -

"If I had taken my children, he would have killed me and then the children would have had no mother, at least this way I am living, I am still their mother".

The desperation and distress this caused was alarming and gave an insight into the shocking levels of violence and control women had survived. Such experiences, unsurprisingly, had a severe impact on women's psychological health, ability to mentally distance themselves from the abuser and gave rise to feelings of shame and guilt for not being able to adequately protect their children. One Albanian woman spoke of the utter trauma and life threatening conditions she and her children experienced as part of her migration journey into the UK. At the time, she had a small child and was heavily pregnant.

"I came here by lorry, so many people died, too many people burned... I was lucky"

She was referring to the number of migrants who had been burnt to death after an explosion in the lorry they were in and also those that had perished as a result of exhaust inhalation, suffocation or dehydration. She spoke of the desperate measures that drove people to take such immense risks in the hope for a better life.

For another woman, having to leave her work colleagues and her career as a dentist was extremely difficult as work had been a major part of her identity and she often described feelings of loss at having to abandon her career when she married her abuser.

Another spoke about how she could not maintain the close

relationship she had with her sister who was her only family member in the UK as her sister's husband saw her as a bad influence and a shamed woman because she had left her abusive husband.

The very rationale of immigration control is to curtail migrant's attachment and integration into society. This was most painfully felt when one of the group members was taken into detention. Because of the speed with which this took place and the fact that the woman was unable to contact anyone other than the sessional project worker, women in the group feared for her safety. Many of the group members tried to contact her and those that could relay updates on her wellbeing back to the group. In this way detention became a consciously employed technique to disrupt, disturb and detach women from putting down roots. It destabilised women's ability to stay safe and was an ever-present threat that many women lived with.

Racism and the impact of racial discrimination

The experience, fear and threats of racism were issues that were interwoven throughout many of the group discussions and were particularly amplified over the summer of 2016 as engagement in the EU referendum intensified. Many women spoke about experiencing a heightened sense of anxiety and fear. One Albanian women with two children told the group that she had been subject to a racist attack during this period and verbally abused for speaking Albanian and subsequently was forced to whisper to her children in public in case anyone heard her accent.

As migrant BME women they were particularly exposed to racism, including racism from the authorities. One Eritrean woman with two children spoke about how Social Services had treated her poorly. They hadn't believed that she was a victim of abuse and on one occasion the Family Support Worker said that, rather than seek safety in the UK away from the violence, she should just go back to Eritrea.

“Social Services were not so good. Bad talking, spoke to me in not a nice way” – Group member

Being in a powerless situation and dependent on Social Services at this point, the woman felt unable to counteract this statement. It was only as she started to engage with the group, after the Safety4Sisters sessional worker had found her refuge accommodation that she was able to articulate the anger, hurt and pain that she had felt during her interactions with this Social Worker.

In other cases, women who were placed in Home Office (HO) accommodation, often in unfamiliar and unwelcoming areas, spoke about the routine racism they experienced in their daily lives:-

They spoke about the pain that this caused and the effects on their children -

“Even my daughter's class fellows, if they see her outside, they use bully language “you are chocolate people, you are brown people”. Sometimes they throw glass pieces. How many times can I talk (to) the police or the house manager?” – Group member

“In my area we are treated badly like aliens, when my child was sick, I went to get help from my neighbours but they saw me and didn't open the door. They are so racist; they know that our building is for asylum seekers”. - Group member

Poverty and destitution

Extract from Women's Group notes - July 2016

One woman raised the issue of destitution and how she has been forced to stay at many different people's homes as a result. She is currently living in the home of a supportive woman who is also a friend but said that in the past she was forced to cook and clean and look after children by others in return for a bed. She talked about having to go to the coach station to keep warm in the night when she had nowhere else to go. She talked about feeling powerlessness and humiliated.

The heightened sense of terror and trauma experienced by women was tangible. The impact of immigration control and the accompanying financial restrictions exacerbated the already oppressive and harsh situations women faced as victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Given the intense pressures and highly controlling situations women were having to live under there were high rates of suicide ideation, attempted suicide and self-harm expressed within the group. This was compounded by the cutbacks that the mental health sector had experienced as women were unable to get immediate appointments or access emergency support. Women regularly talked about being on waiting list for therapeutic support for considerably long periods of time during which time they were finding it increasingly difficult to cope. Women also spoke about how therapeutic support was often a source of further distress as it brought up trauma that they had no way of managing outside the therapy and where they felt little control over their lives particularly in relation to their immigration cases.

In an incredibly difficult case, a woman came to the group and disclosed a catalogue of appallingly brutal abuse in country of origin, during her route to the UK and once within the UK. She spoke about the numerous agencies that had failed to intervene or help her and that she had been unable to access refuge or alternative safe accommodation as she had no recourse public funds so was forced to stay with her abuser and when she could take no more become homeless. Her mental health was

so severe, so that she ended up being sectioned under the Mental Health Act.

Platform for voice and skills development

The group created a significant and critical platform for women to voice and channel their experiences, emotions and realities to a wider audience. Through collective encouragement, women participated in a film that was showcased at the Safety4Sisters International Women's Day public event entitled 'Voices from the Margins'. This film was a powerful documentation of the lives of some of the group members.

Through this empowerment work, women developed skills in documenting and voicing their situations as survivor experts both individually and as a collective group which in turn, has supported other women in similar situations. Members of the Women's Group found this piece of work enormously important and saw it as an opportunity to challenge negative media depictions about their lives and to self-represent to a wider audience.

On occasions women were also encouraged to participate in Safety4Sisters' external campaigning work, an area in which women were particularly keen to participate in.

Access to justice

Many of the women in the group spoke about their frustration about their cases, legal matters that had not been addressed, partially addressed or poorly dealt with. Due to language issues, lack of knowledge about state and judiciary functions and systems in the UK, trauma and mental health issues, women had often been unable to access legally aid solicitors or they had seen unscrupulous and expensive private solicitors. This created additional poverty and often resulted in poor casework. An essential aspect of advocacy work was to ensure that the various time frames for reporting, documenting and submitting women's applications to the legal services and Home Office are complied with and that as much evidence as possible is garnered. As this is a complex and time consuming issue that needs to be picked up as early as possible, many women were denied justice simply because they submitted out of time or submitted insufficient evidence for reasons outside their control. This created enormous obstacles for women. Much of the case related work that Safety4Sisters undertook within the pilot was to ensure that, despite the variations in the specific cases women bring to us, all have equal access to law and before the law which was extremely time consuming for the part time sessional worker. The group became an increasingly important site where women could encourage, support and raise confidence to others during this disruptive and challenging time. Women who had received positive decisions on their cases acted as small but important sources of hope for others and despite the gruelling and difficult lives led by many on the group, women found some solace in this.

Continuation of the Women's Group

Our evaluation of both the process and practicalities of running a group and the issues raised by group members has reinforced our initial belief that supporting women to collectively find space to talk about the emotional

impact of both abuse and immigration control is key to developing holistic provision for women. Although we had to make some adjustments to our delivery model we are committed to improve and sustain this important project within our wider work. We held an evaluation session with women at the end of the pilot project where members were able to reflect and feedback on the effectiveness of the group. Women spoke highly about the group and its impact on their lives and ability to manage their situations despite the limited resourcing. As an organisation, Safety4Sisters saw the importance and potential of the group as it grew over the 10-month pilot project and are committed to develop and build on this early work in future developments. We want to create more sustainable ways to support the group through the following ways:

- More formalised procedures for volunteer support and supervision
- Increase the capacity to deliver group work on a weekly basis
- Increase resources for support for children within the group
- Increased opportunities for generating donations for women and children
- Increase the number and range of practitioner based workshops
- Develop our voice as a group to influence external audiences through social media, film and visual work

Volunteer reflections - Amina

“I always believed in women. I care about women. When we launched the Migrant Women’s Rights to Safety Project I suggested to volunteer my time cooking for the group. I didn’t have any idea about how it was going to be but I was thinking how to support and cheer the women up. From the beginning, I was happy, emotional and inspired by the women. Thanks to the women I get strength, love and joy every time I cook. Tuesday Women’s Group is a very special day for me. I make sure that every one of the women has the nutrition needed and the flavours of home cooked food. I know that many of the women have little access to good, home cooked food and they miss this greatly. I know that the women also have little money to spend so if they can get something delicious and comforting on Tuesdays then I am happy to make this. I make many dishes to cater to all – halal, fish, lots of vegetarian dishes, dips and chutneys. I try to give something different every week, although I am Algerian and many of my dishes are from my country, I try to introduce new flavours and styles in my cooking. It’s good for women to try new ideas and new things.

Eating together is important and I try to recreate a family meal time so all the women can sit, enjoy and relax together.”

Volunteer reflections - Joyce

“I have been volunteering for Safety4Sisters for five months and I would like to share some of my experiences and reflections of working with the organisation. I attend the weekly support group session every Tuesday.

My previous profession was working as a primary school teacher, mostly in diverse inner city schools. I have always had an interest in different cultures and communities and I have worked with children and families from many different backgrounds, often facing challenges in their lives. With an interest in immigration issues, I was keen to undertake some work in this field.

Having this professional background gave me a small insight into the issues that the women in the group would be facing. However, with no experience in immigration issues or working with gender based violence, I have been learning about these issues as an ongoing process, many of which I found very shocking at first. I, like so many others, was unaware of the extent to which having insecure immigration status in the UK impacts on people’s lives. I felt like I had discovered a group of almost invisible women that society knows little or nothing about and that have very minimal support available to them, if any.

I feel like there is an image of the migrant for many UK citizens, sometimes negative, but also often lacking understanding in the many ways that people find themselves in this situation. Society is aware of refugees coming from war torn countries, aware of migrant workers, often with the image of a man. But are they aware of women on spousal visas, for example, who find themselves destitute when faced with violence and no longer have access to any part of the welfare system? Are they aware of women fleeing gender based violence in their native country, under threat of death if they return? I, myself did not have the understanding that I do now about this group of our society and working with the organisation, as well as learning so much, has made me passionate that others should know about the obstacles faced and that changes need to be made in various areas of our infrastructure to avoid the destitution, dangers, poverty and mental health difficulties that are very real risk-factors.

The most striking feature of S4S for me, is the atmosphere. A group of women, facing life that is a daily struggle, many in extreme fear, supporting each other, listening to one another talking about their experiences and offering advice from their own. There are tears, there is pain, but there is laughter and love in abundance. Many of the women talk of the group as a family. For some, it is the one time in their week that they can go and be with friends and others who understand what they are going through. There is structure to the group but it is never the same, always evolving. Different subjects come up, speakers come in, activities are arranged, voices are heard, bonds are formed.

As a volunteer, my own position has also evolved as I have become part of the group, trusted by the women and continued to gain more understanding of the numerous aspects to their lives which are problematic. My role is varied; from making tea, washing up, administrative tasks, to talking with individual women about their feelings and circumstances and helping with childcare. More recently, I have begun to start the group by leading movement and music with a focus on relaxation and breathing which has been popular with the women and a grounding start to the day. Another rewarding task I have undertaken was using my teaching and TEFL background to support one of the women with her study towards taking English language exams that would then go on to allow her to convert her qualifications from Iraq so that she can use them here in professional work.”

Support & Advocacy Work

The support and advocacy work with migrant women who were experiencing gender based violence and abuse was, as we predicted, a constant battle to defend even the minimal levels of rights and protection afforded to women facing violence across the UK. These women had experienced or were experiencing some of the most severe and protracted forms of violence and yet most had never been able to access support and justice.

The work of Safety4Sisters in difficult circumstances, often alone and with few resources, inevitably involved a level of unavoidable risk in order to reach some of the most marginalised and vulnerable women in our society. These were the women who had the greatest needs and who should have been afforded the greatest protection. The quality of any service can be judged by its ability to reach and be effective for those most vulnerable and most in need. To this end the standing point of the Safety4Sisters service (which became a somewhat of a slogan) was “Leave no woman behind”.

We worked creatively and without judgement to explore routes to justice and effective safety. We were very clear as to our feminist, human rights, anti-racist and anti-discriminatory principles that underpinned our work. The model of the project was one which supported but also empowered women, based on a fundamental understanding and a willingness to look at the situation from each individual woman’s perspective. It was also essential to assess the individual woman’s situation and to work together with her from the point at which she presented. The model also encompasses accepting and understanding the women’s practical and emotional priorities in keeping themselves safe in relation to the perpetrator but also with regards their wider community, both in the UK and in their country of origin, which inevitably informs decisions and choices.

Crucial to the model was spending time listening to women and creating a safe and confidential space, enabling women to talk. This highly valued and prioritised, allowing us to unravel the choices a woman had had to make in her survival, during and after the violent relationship. This subsequently built trust and understanding, and through our respect of her judgement and experience, led us to a shared, step by step development of a safety plan and the safest possible choices. The trust and respect fostered opened up avenues for support and education, explorations of feminist, human rights, anti-racist discussions, leading onto longer term freedom from violence. It also enabled us as workers and feminists to continually learn from the women and improve our practices in order to create more effective responses to their needs.

The one to one support, advocacy and eventual outcomes for women whom Safety4Sisters worked with were as varied and diverse as the experiences and situations women came with. Despite this fact, the threads of commonality which quickly became apparent were their experiences of racism, poverty, discrimination, patriarchy and male violence, and how these had been magnified by immigration control. In this context, migrant women’s choices were limited by the barriers which were thrown up by a wide variety of services - both statutory and voluntary agencies. The core of the work of Safety4Sisters became primarily challenging as we addressed the difficulties of dismantling these barriers to protection and safety whilst supporting the woman to survive both physically and emotionally. At a wider level, the work had to be transformational, challenging but also educative and inspiring to other services. This included documenting and evidencing not only the barriers to migrant women’s safety, but also the practices that worked on the ground for women and brought about positive outcomes.

Case History - 1

We worked with a young woman on a spousal visa. She had very limited English and very limited experience of going out alone in the UK as a result of her husband's control and she had been told that as his wife she was unable to be "legal" in the country independent of him.

She was severely beaten by her husband who left her on the floor telling her not to be in the house when she returned. She fled to a nearby relative's house who called the police. The police took a statement and the Police Domestic Violence Officer came around to speak to her in the house the next day and offered to take her to the hospital due to the injuries she had sustained. By the time the police had returned the following day she had decided to withdraw her statement, didn't go to the hospital, refused the offer to try and find her refuge space and said she wanted to stay in the house with her relatives. She was also sign-posted to Victim Support where she went twice.

The relative looking after her, took her to a private male solicitor of the same ethnic origin who did the Victim of Domestic Violence SET (DV) application which was refused due to her lack of evidence at that point and then applied for an administrative review. The woman was referred to us at this point over the phone by the relative who felt he could no longer cope with the woman's depression and said she had attempted suicide.

Emotional support through process - Woman is supported on weekly basis at S4S Women's Group and one to one session alongside group. She is given information at specialist S4S workshops, has chance to talk with other women, accesses support from other native tongue speakers and is supported through the continued pressures of the community and family.

Practical support through poverty inherent in the process of leaving - Woman arriving destitute at the office is given food, travel expenses and emergency toiletries and taxi paid for to get her to the hostel. Woman is given regular hot meal & travel expenses to access Safety4Sisters Women's Group and to travel to the immigration solicitors until JSA comes through. She is also given support to access free health care with HC1 form.

Access to Justice - Legal Aid - (the administrative review upheld the refusal) S4S took woman to see a legal aid immigration solicitor with proof of income and ID where she was able to make a new SET (DV) application.

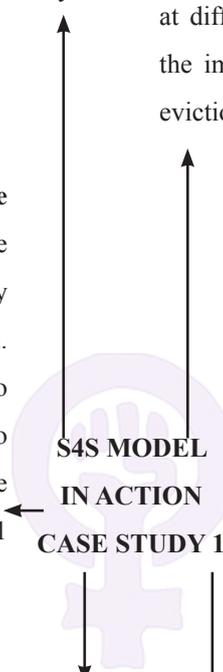
Empowerment and Understanding of Patriarchy - Woman is given information at group on the immigration system, women's rights, has a chance to support other women as she gains confidence, and shares her experiences and finds her voice is valued and respected. She starts understanding her experiences beginning with not taking the blame herself and that she is not the only woman experiencing gender based violence.

Outcomes

- **The woman is safe in a place unknown to anyone but those whom she chooses to tell**
- **Settles well in hostel, moves out of destitution, claims JSA & Housing Benefit**
- **Signs on with a new doctor & accesses free health care**
- **Accesses legal aid and puts in a new Set (DV) application**
- **Comes to the S4S Women's Group on a regular basis and makes new friends is less isolated & talks about experiences - begins healing & recovery**
- **Accesses an English class, improves her understanding and spoken English**
- **Has a better understanding of the immigration system, her rights to safety and more confidence in using the police**
- **Becomes confident using public transport which increased independence**

Safety Rights - Advocacy to secure BME women's hostel by explaining at the point of potential referral refusal, why the woman was still entitled to claim Housing Benefit & JSA as the administrative review continued her entitlement from the SET (DV) application. The hostel worker was kept informed as to the woman's immigration journey, encouraged to write a supporting letter to be submitted in evidence, and at difficult point S4S wrote to the management to explain the immigration situation when there are vague threats of eviction due to the length of time she has been there.

Anti-Racist Perspective - Exploring refusal of SET (DV) & evidencing violence - S4S visited the private solicitor & discussed refusal. We found out that the police and Victim Support had both said in evidence to the Home Office that the woman had not cooperated and assumed she was genuinely happy to stay at relative (who was also husband's brother in law) & the doctor's evidence was very weak. S4S talked through her experiences with an interpreter over a period of weeks and she explained the threats that had been made to her mother in her country of origin that if she got her husband in trouble with the police or talked to people about what had happened her mother would be evicted from her house and would be in danger. S4S spoke to the police and accessed police records, which revealed the extent of the violence that had been recorded on the first call out in great detail and that a MARAC has been carried out. These two pieces of evidence with a supporting letter from Safety4Sisters, the hostel and from the doctor after a further check-up, was enough to put in a new SET DV application.



Case History - 2

Safety4Sisters had a referral from a social worker concerned about a woman living in a men's hostel who he thought was "no recourse to public funds". We made contact with her and discovered she had been in the men's hostel (one of six homeless women sleeping at the end of a long room of a men's night shelter). She had ended up there because her emotional abusive and controlling (British) partner had called the police to say she had thrown a plate at him in temper. He then, in the police station, made other accusations about her which he then retracted and the police actually disbelieved. She had a 3-month-old baby and was financially dependent on her husband, who had taken her in when she had overstayed a visitor visa. He then married her and basically told her she had no immigration status without him and that he would secure it for her sometime in the future (as they had a child together).

Despite having a very young baby and the police not being fully convinced of the man's story she was kept in the police cells overnight and when they released her in the morning the husband didn't let her back into the house. When the police were called, they said they couldn't do anything because it was his house and she was unable to see the baby. When she then went to Social Services to try and get support to get access to her child and to get a roof over her head she was told that they had no duty to her because she didn't have the baby and it was in the baby's best interest to be with the father not her because she was homeless (due to her being "no recourse to public funds") and the father wasn't.

She had therefore been living at the men's hostel for 6 weeks and had not seen her baby for all this time and had to wander the streets destitute between 7am and 9pm outside of hostel hours over Christmas and in freezing conditions. She was HIV positive and was supported by other organizations, none of which had seemed to address her needs arising either from the emotional abuse, or challenge the decisions taken by authorities that had led to her living in a men's night shelter, being separated from a 3-month-old baby and walking the streets traumatised and hungry.

Safety Rights - Using resources at S4S to temporarily house woman in bed and breakfast until Social Services eventually through legal challenge conceded responsibility.

Rights to Justice - Legal Aid advocacy and referral to a community care lawyer in order to challenge and fight for woman's rights under the Children's Act for Social Services to take responsibility for woman and baby in order that they be reunited and temporarily housed. Supported woman to secure legal aid immigration advice and representation and so submitting an application as the parent of a British Child (FLR FP). Support to access advice from a legal aid family lawyer in relation to child contact rights.

Emotional support through process - Woman is supported on weekly basis at group and one to one alongside group. She is given information, chance to talk with other women and to recover from her experiences of separation from child, emotional abuse & living rough in men's hostel. Also continued support and advice re child contact and pressures from continued emotional abuse from the perpetrator at contact and around her HIV status.

Anti-Racist Perspective - Advocating and challenging Social Services and police response to vulnerable black, migrant woman with very young baby, made homeless and destitute by abusive, articulate professional, white, British partner. Using the law to counteract this racism.

Practical support through poverty inherent in the process of leaving - Woman arriving destitute at the office is given food, travel expenses and emergency toiletries. Safety4Sisters secured temporary accommodation at a bed and breakfast and money to feed herself in the day. Woman is given regular hot meal & travel expenses to access Safety4Sisters Women's Group and to travel to the immigration and community care solicitors. She is also given support to access free health care with HC1 form. When she gets her child back the group space becomes an important space for her play with the child.

Empowerment and Understanding of Patriarchy - Woman is given information at group on the immigration system, women's rights, and a chance to share her experiences with other women.

**S4S MODEL
IN ACTION
CASE STUDY 2**

Outcomes

- Leaves men's night shelter and accesses safe temporary accommodation
- Reunited with 3-month-old baby
- Successfully challenges Social Services refusal of support
- Accesses legal aid solicitor for immigration advice
- Moves back into perpetrators house and he moves out
- Continual negotiations supported by Safety4Sisters re father's access to child and is able and confident enough to prevent him using access visits to enter house and receives child maintenance
- Is informed and better understands her rights and the immigration system,
- Grows in confidence, supporting younger women in Safety4Sisters group, sharing her experiences and even taking part in the S4S film documenting women's experiences and talk at S4S conference
- Accesses support for medical condition

Case History - 3

A woman phoned Safety4Sisters after she had called the Rights of Women Immigration Helpline who had given her Safety4Sisters number. She had been living in her abusive partner's property. Although he had left the property, he was threatening to return when his tenancy ran out. She was destitute, frightened and had been told by her ex-partner that she had no rights in this country. Nineteen years ago, she had entered the UK on a spousal visa and, after fleeing domestic violence from a previous partner, had put in for leave to remain under the Domestic Violence Rule as it was then. Because of having to move around to stay safe she hadn't ever received a decision on her application.

She then started a relationship with her current abuser who was able to control and regularly beat her because she had no immigration status and was totally isolated. She developed Multiple Sclerosis and became increasingly dependent and even more isolated. She left her abusive partner's house and moved in with a neighbour, next door, as the date for the end of the tenancy was imminent and she feared his return.

She was refused refuge space due to her immigration status. S4S supported her on the long and difficult road to securing safe accommodation and support when the first response from the Local Authority was to dispute responsibility in relation to her care needs because of her immigration status as she had "no recourse to public funds". They disbelieved the threat of violence and suggested she had no rights to support.

Practical Support through Poverty & Homelessness

- Visited woman who was destitute to give emergency food, travel expenses and emergency toiletries and taxi fares to get her to the group when her medical condition meant she was too exhausted to use public transport. Regular hot meal at the group, often the only one she has all week due to poverty and lack of care support. Also, fundraised for special mattress cover to combat her extreme sleep problems. Given support to access free health care with HC1 form and also continual advocacy to ensure her health appointments and medical care were kept up while she moved around temporary accommodation addresses.

Safety Rights & Disability Rights - Advocacy to secure temporary housing with appropriate support for care needs in safety through Local Authority from the first point of contact when she had fled to a neighbour flat a few doors down. Ongoing work to keep Social Services informed of woman's' immigration application progress and to putting in legal challenge on the level and quality of support offered. Put in writing an explanation of her situation re immigration when there were vague threats of eviction due to the length of time she had been supported by them.

Access to Justice - Legal Aid - S4S ensured access to legal aid immigration advice and a community care lawyer to challenge the local authority over their duty of care and homelessness provision.

Empowerment and Understanding of Patriarchy - Woman attends the rights & information workshops at the group. Has a chance to support other women as she gains confidence, and shares her experiences and finds her voice is valued and respected.

Anti-Racist Perspective / Rights in the Immigration System - Pursued the Home Office, with a series of letters supported by the MP, who are still unable to locate her file or any of her previous immigration history over the past 19 years and making them accountable by involving her MP. Challenging suggestions from the Local Authority that she should return to her country of origin without any assessment of her rights to stay.

Emotional Support through Process - Woman is supported on weekly basis at S4S Women's Group and one to one sessions. Her inappropriate accommodation and the lack of specialist care which would usually be afforded to women with her disability, on top of side effects of medication, the illness itself, and her experiences of violence cause her severe depression. S4S emotional support is critical at this time because of the additional support in relation to her overriding immigration stress. S4S offers woman other services but she declines as she feels lack understanding of issues or will have a punitive reaction to her case.

S4S MODEL IN ACTION CASE STUDY 3

Outcomes

- **The woman is in safe accommodation and perpetrator doesn't know where she is**
- **On-going problems accessing the medical care at the right time but she generally has the medication she needs**
- **Accesses legal aid for immigration and for community care representation**
- **Suffers from depression and physical pain but continues to fight, with S4S support, for her rights to secure indefinite leave, which will then entitle her to a full care package from the Local Authority and more appropriate housing**
- **Continues to access advice from Rights of Women in London and the S4S various specialised workshops to inform and empower herself**
- **Comes to the S4S women's group on a regular basis and makes new friends is less isolated. Kept in the support network when too ill to travel in**
- **Has taken opportunities to talk publicly about her human rights being denied and her situation**
- **Has a better understanding of the immigration system, her rights to safety and support from Social Services**

Case History - 4

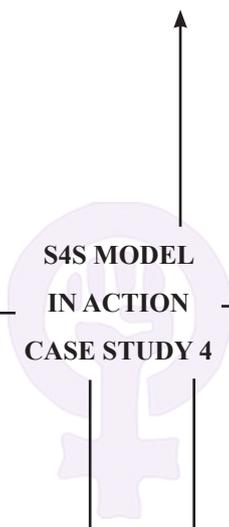
A woman with 5 children had been in an emotionally, physically and financially abusive relationship for 10 years, spoke little English and had no access to money. She came to Safety4Sisters via a friend who was already a member of Safety4Sisters. The husband had grown increasingly abusive after the birth of the last baby and made threats of physical violence pointing a knife at her on one occasion. The Health Visitor had referred her into the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) service who had been supporting her for about 6 weeks. The IDVA believed her and had told her that they couldn't access refuge space for her because she was on a spousal visa and so had "no recourse to public funds" so the refuges that she had rung wouldn't take her. She was also told that Social Services wouldn't be able to put her up because she had 5 children and there was no accommodation big enough to put them all up temporarily. When she had gone to the council's Homeless Families office with her friend the worker had almost physically "shooed" her out of the office saying she had already told her on numerous occasions she was not entitled to homeless accommodation.

The friend was concerned that the woman was having to stay with the abusive husband and continually crying and confiding in her about the extent of her fear and stress. The woman was brought to the office one afternoon by the friend and it was quickly discovered that her ID card showed she had actually been granted permanent leave nearly 8 years previously and thus was entitled to benefits. We had this confirmed by an immigration solicitor and then spoke to the police with her, explaining she was too frightened to return home. They asked her to come to the police station, which she did. The police officer didn't take the violence seriously and said that she could leave the older children with the father and take the two youngest with her and go into a bed and breakfast or put some of the children in care if she didn't want to leave them with their father. She was forced to stay 2 nights at her friends with her 5 children, not wanting to split them up, put them in care or walk the streets with them.

After two days advocacy and challenging the police and the IDVA (who still thought there was no way she could leave with all the children) a very supportive and impressive police officer got an interpreter, took a statement and took them all in a police mini bus to a refuge. Within a week of being in the refuge the older son left, returned to his father and took him to the friend's house who had helped her, where he drove round madly, nearly knocking her over in the street and shouting abuse. The woman is still in the refuge and is waiting for re-housing.

Safety Rights – Advocacy to challenge decision that she was not able or entitled to safe accommodation with all her children away from abusive husband. Pursuing her rights to safety & protection from the police including insisting that staying at friend was not acceptable safe accommodation. Putting in a police complaint and asking for protection for the friend following threats from husband to her

Access to Justice - Advocacy to challenge the IDVA’s belief that she had “no recourse to public” backed up by legal aid immigration solicitor



Anti-Racist Perspective - Challenging an unsubstantiated position of the statutory services that she must be “no recourse to public funds” as a spouse based on false assumptions. Pursuing the police for an interpreter and her rights to make a statement so that her voice could be heard in the police station

Emotional Support through Process Supporting both her and her friend through an emotionally traumatic experiences as she left the family home and tried to access safe accommodation. Support achieved through one meeting face to face in the Safety4Sisters office and continued phone calls through 2 nights and 3 days. Supporting the friend who continues to access the Safety4Sisters group

Practical Support through Poverty inherent in the process of leaving- and with no access to cash due to history of financial abuse. Providing woman with toiletries, nappies and food for her and children when she was leaving. Liaising with the refuge to provide food over the weekend when she was arriving without any immediate financial resources when there would be no staff available. Providing travel expenses to get her and her friend to Safety4Sisters and back

Outcomes

- The woman and 4 of her children are safe in a refuge
- She has an independent income through claiming Income Support & Housing Benefit
- The IDVA is better informed of how to assess women’s immigration issues and the importance of seeking legal advice, through the S4S advocacy
- The woman is kept in touch with Safety4Sisters through another member of the group
- Has a better understanding of the immigration system, her rights to safety and more confidence in using the police
- The woman has a better understanding of her rights as a woman in the UK

Identifying Problems & the Barriers to Support, Protection and Justice for Migrant Women Experiencing Gender Based Violence

Statistics have been taken from Safety4Sisters case records from 61 women either via help lines (19) or who came into Safety4Sisters project (42). The statistics are to inform readers of the wide range and quite shocking types of barriers and problems that women faced. We did not carry out research or ask specific questions but merely documented anonymously some of the experiences women disclosed or that we were witness to throughout the project.

Fear of immigration control and the Home Office was a major form of control and coercion that abusers used to continue subjecting migrant women to gender based violence. With misinformation, threats of deportation, detention, arrest and of having her children taken into care or having to leave without them, abusers were able to isolate and control women. They ensured that women were not informed of their rights, didn't have the opportunity to learn the language or develop independence in their new community in the UK and weren't able to tell the police, Social Services or anyone seen as "in authority".

16 women told S4S they were threatened by the partner that if she left or went to the police she would be deported or arrested

29 women said they were too frightened to use the police for protection

8 women had been threatened with having their children taken into care because of homelessness and being identified as "no recourse to public funds". (1 woman with a disability actually had her children taken into care)

Women were left frightened and terrorised by the abuser but were more frightened of leaving and being picked up by the Home Office, police or Social Services. Women were left with stark choices, stay and live with the gender based violence or leave and face homelessness, destitution, and then risk being picked up by immigration officers from the Home Office, being detained and deported. They also then risked being forced to be separated from their children by leaving them with the perpetrator or having them put into Local Authority care.

In today's political climate of increased immigration surveillance and the widening of public duties to investigate, record and report on immigration status by public services, women were unsure whether even health or gender based violence support services would also direct them back to the Home Office, so they wouldn't take the risk.

Often the services the women feared were the very services which are usually identified as the lifeline to protection and safety for women experiencing gender based violence. They were also often the services which should have been used to document crucial evidence needed further down the line, in the route to safety and justice, to enable a woman to access legal aid or injunctions.

Women faced being controlled by their husband /partner or family, reinforced by control by the immigration system and sometimes also reinforced by services whose first response was to question and define her support, safety and protection in terms of her immigration status. As a result, it has been seen that support services then acted as immigration gate keepers to essential services and refused to take responsibility for women's safety.

29 women were refused refuge space due to their immigration status

6 women were misinformed or wrongly identified as NRPF by agencies and then refused support

6 women on phone referrals were refused refuge and no follow up was carried out as to the outcome of her homelessness and safety from gender based violence.

When resources to public services are being slashed by the Government, the services with limited time and resources were quick to identify the immigration status of a woman as a reason to sign post her on to another agency for safety and support, and without follow up as to the success or even the arrival of the woman to the next service this left the most marginalised migrant women even more vulnerable.

Without main stream services support, women turned increasingly to faith groups, friends and family where they missed out on specialist support and safety and became vulnerable to further exploitation and homelessness when these sometimes abusive, fragile or short term solutions broke down. Others were found in inappropriate accommodation such as space in a men's night shelter and others in bed and breakfast hostels with children where the safety issues weren't able to be addressed.

9 women reporting gender based violence were left with family or friends who were reluctant to take them

Government cuts to legal aid also led to a lack of availability to free (legally aid) legal immigration advice and this prevented woman accessing justice, and often being ripped off by unscrupulous private lawyers or being left without any legal advice at all.

14 women would have very likely been entitled to legal aid but had not accessed a legal aid lawyer for immigration advice

4 women said they were struggling to make contact with their private solicitor

32 women had not accessed any support for their immigration issues

4 women living in refuges had not had any support around their immigration issues

6 women were left without support to go to court (either civil or immigration courts)

A significant barrier for women to safety and protection was the lack of knowledge and training that front-line services had in order to support migrant women who experienced gender based violence. Mistakes were made when workers guessed the immigration status of a woman, and didn't ensure the woman accessed immigration advice as a first step to safety and protection. Some workers didn't understand the implications of honour based violence in the UK and threats from country of origin, on the choices women made in relation to their options for safety.

Some women were prevented from cooperating with the police and statutory services because of these unseen but very serious threats from extended family both in and outside the UK that they couldn't disclose to workers. This then led to a lack of evidence to support the woman's immigration application based on domestic violence (under the Domestic Violence Rule) and also to the police and other services withdrawing support.

16 women experienced threats from country of origin

14 women had threats from extended family in the UK but were not in a refuge or secure accommodation

2 women were recorded by the police as not having cooperated (when there were threats of honour based violence that weren't disclosed)

Poor mental and physical health as a result of gender based violence prevented many women from leaving violent partners or caused them to return back, or which left them struggling to cope on a daily basis. This was magnified by immigration issues, increased isolation, language barriers and mistrust of health services (who question women's immigration status and eligibility to services). Women's lack of knowledge on how to access services and their rights to free health care, meant it was more difficult for migrant women to get the support they need. There were long waiting lists for counselling and without advocacy and support women had missed out on specialist mental health support at crucial points in their lives which had escalated their problems and for some women had led them into hospital, one women been sectioned during the

time of our project and others had disclosed to us previous suicide attempts.

16 women were unable to access counselling and support for their mental health when they wanted to

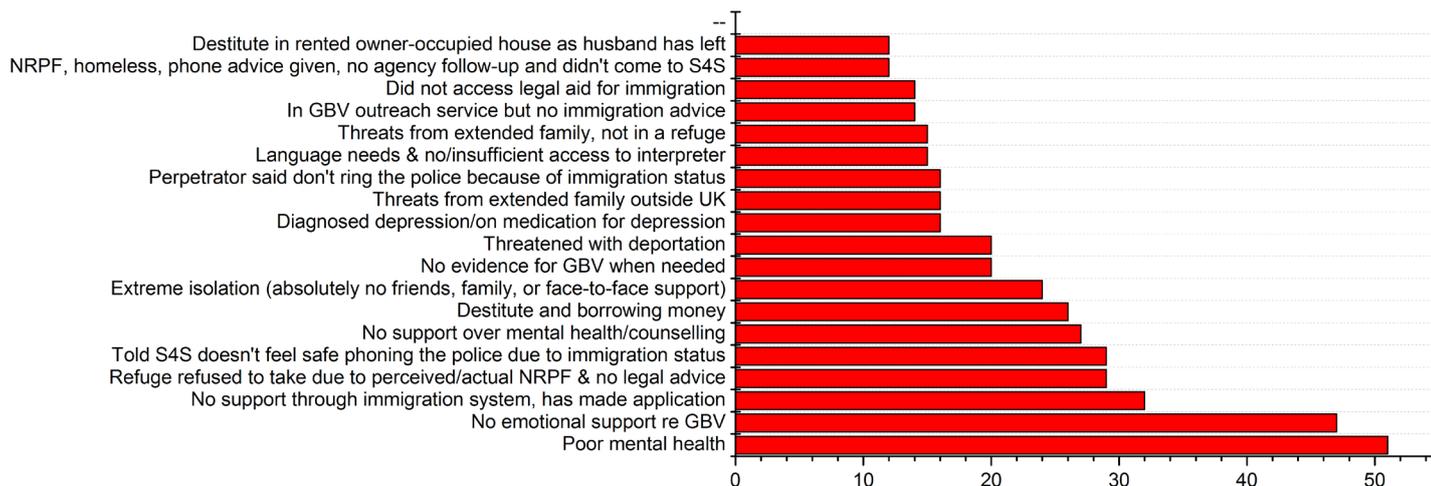
6 women disclosed attempted suicide and 3 others had said they considered it

10 women threatened with deportation by non-Home Office services when they had the right to stay in the

The experiences collated from the 61 women accessing the project have been recorded some of which have only happened once to one woman but are as equally important to document and learn from as those which are most common as shown in the BAR chart below. We are also aware that what women disclose is often only the tip of the ice berg in terms of the suffering and injustices they have endured and many things are too painful or traumatic to verbalise.

The most common are identified in the bar chart and are taken from the advocacy and support work, the group work and phone calls.

Most common problems and barriers to safety at point of referral



Short Case Studies Illustrating Barriers

Ms X was told she was “no recourse to public funds” by an unknown source and so when she rung a helpline who tried to access refuge space for her, she was told she was unable to go into a refuge anywhere. She had been put up by a relative who wanted her to leave because he couldn’t cope with her distress. When she came to Safety4Sisters, we discovered that she actually had had an Employment Support Allowance claim, in that had been recently reassessed after 3 months and refused. She had the right to claim benefits and was actually already on the DDV concession having given up her spousal visa because of domestic violence, but she had little English and didn’t understand the system enough to explain over the phone to those trying to find refuge space for her.

Ms Y contacted Safety4Sisters when she was living in a bed and breakfast hostel with her very active 2-year old child after experiencing gender based violence. She had been on a spousal visa and had “no recourse to public funds” and was unable to access refuge space. She had some savings but she couldn’t use it to pay for refuge space because the specialist BME refuge said they couldn’t take her in because they couldn’t be 100% sure that her application for Indefinite Leave to Remain (LTR) under the Domestic Violence Rule (SET DV) would be successful and she would then be unable to pay rent. The woman was not completely destitute and so at that stage she couldn’t use the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDV concession) to access temporary leave and get Housing Benefit and the solicitor couldn’t put in her SET DV application until Ms Y’s money ran out and she could then apply for the DDV concession, otherwise she would not have any money to pay for the SET (DV) application. The woman was without specialist outreach support because the BME domestic violence group met in an area near to the abuser and although she was away from the areas where her abuser lived and he was on police bail, she was not quite sure that his extended family wouldn’t trace her whereabouts.

Ms Z had “no recourse to public funds” and had been without outreach, IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocate) or specialist gender based violence emotional support because following the violence she was taken by the police with her child to a relative who was reluctant to accommodate her, instead of a refuge or housed by Social Services. She remained isolated and learnt very little English. These relatives then wrongly advised her to claim benefits and when the Child Tax Credit eventually was stopped, the relatives began putting pressure on her to leave. When she finally tried to leave 3 years later, the gender based violence is described as “historical” and so she was disqualified from support services, and faced destitution, debt and isolation. She came to Safety4Sisters to try and untangle the confusion around her immigration status, to get help with her debt and issues around the perpetrator wanting child contact, whilst still struggling to deal with the effects of the violence.

Outcomes

The model Safety4Sisters worked to during the pilot project was within a frame work that recognised and challenged the discrimination, racism, patriarchy and poverty, which were both in addition to, and part and parcel of the injustices and harshness of the immigration system that women lived under. The integrated model put each individual woman at the heart of the service and offered support through group work and one to one advice and advocacy and also a service which offered emergency provision for women's basic immediate needs.

The recorded outcomes were not intended as a statistical exercise to map the scale of the problems women faced but were to evidence and illustrate the breath of the work Safety4Sisters undertook with women and show the positives achievements made possible. The diverse situations in relation to women's immigration and the gender based violence they experienced brought about broad ranging outcomes, often ones unique to individual women, reflecting the creativity and women centred approach of Safety4Sisters.

It was important in our service delivery to facilitate and present a non-judgemental space and an atmosphere of confidentiality, safety, respect, warmth and care. From this the spirit of the group emerged and developed in a unique and totally amazing way as the women owned the space for themselves and created a very natural healing, supportive and empowering experience for one another. This isn't captured in statistical outcomes but was often what helped women survive the trauma of past experiences and those very difficult and stressful practical steps they had still to cope with, to get through the systems and bureaucracies at a time when they still felt vulnerable and frightened.

What is clear from these outcomes is that the basic model worked well and produced many positive outcomes because Safety4Sisters were clear in our broad framework of a Human Rights based, anti-racist, feminist approach that in practice influenced the work with each individual women and her unique set of circumstances.

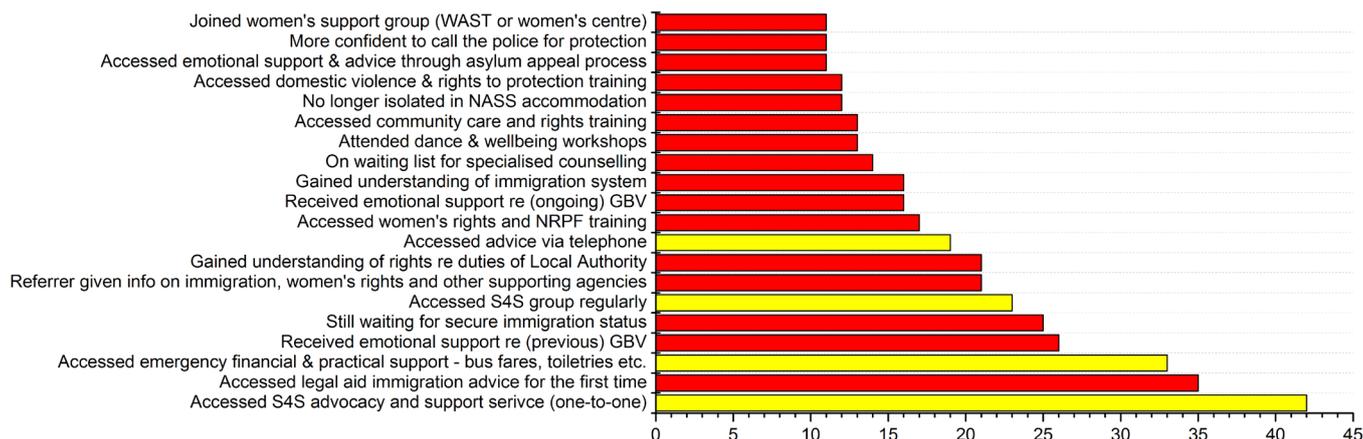
Successful Routes to Safety through Creative Women - Centred Working

Safety4Sisters were able to work creatively and flexibly, exploring solutions with the woman herself, supporting her to ensure the best possible outcome for her own situation. We aimed to take responsibility, at that point she made contact with us, for ensuring we found a safe option or options, for her to consider and then support her to take forward which ever route she chose.

In practice for some women this meant they were able to leave violent partners when they had been lead to believe they had no rights to do so, or had been refused the resources to do so. For others, it meant that when they came totally exhausted to the support group they could sleep, eat and an hour later feel human and safe enough to begin talking and sharing their experiences with other women they hardly knew in a trusting environment. Options, that seemingly appeared on the surface to be the safest for the woman, sometimes were rejected and it was only through her trust of us and talking in depth, that we understood what was influencing her decisions and limiting her choices and then we could work with her on the direction she chose to be the safest. This is best illustrated by the women who were unwilling to use the police or Social Services and often missed out on the protection and support of services because they were seen not be "engaging". However, these women were the most frightened and vulnerable and were being threatened by family in their country of origin (such as in Pakistan and Iran for two of the women we supported) as well as by the perpetrator/s in the UK. On both occasions Safety4Sisters obtained the evidence from the police by requesting the woman's police records which revealed the extent of the violence first witnessed and recorded by the police which could then be used in her immigration application despite her later non-cooperation with both the police \and victim support and doctors. In both incidences, the women had been referred to a MARAC which had recorded no further action due to the women's non-cooperation. The outcomes for both were that applications for ILR could be made as a victim of domestic violence using the SET (DV). Safety4Sisters obtained MARAC reports for 10 of the women who needed them as evidence in their applications.

Most common outcomes

Yellow bars indicate method of accessing support/advice



Outcomes for Women who entered Safety4Sisters Project on Spousal Visas

18 % of the women were on spousal visa when referred to S4S - (2% On spousal visa applied for SET (DV) but not on DDV concession, 3% On 10 year route, 13% On 5 year route).

Of these women-

- 72% put in an application for LTR under SET (DV) rule
- 45% successfully awarded DDV concession
- 18% were phone calls and outcome was unknown
- 27% couldn't apply for DDV concession due lack of evidence of GBV on emotional abuse, in full time work or had savings
- 36% secured refuge space with DDV concession
- 18% secured ILR – with Set DV application

Phone Calls

Out of the 61 women who used the project, 19 were from phone calls, either referrals or agencies wanting advice for women they were supporting or had spoken to on their helplines. 68% of these calls related to women who were still living experiencing gender based violence. In relation to what eventual outcome there was for the women at the other end of the referral agency's call, evidence was very limited. We were only able to gather 30% of women's eventual outcomes after we had sign posted women via the referral agency to other organisations and to Safety4Sisters. Of these women, 30% found safe accommodation, one returned to the perpetrator. A major issue that we came up against was that women's outcomes were not followed up and it was not known whether their problems were resolved or not. On one occasion, an external organisations worker had asked the woman to ring back once she found out the answers to her questions concerning GBV and her immigration. The woman never phoned back and the worker didn't take a number so couldn't follow it up. Of the 8 women actually directed into Safety4Sisters service, only 1 woman ever turned up from such a referral when we hadn't been able to speak to them directly. Safety4Sisters were able to support workers as to the options women faced on all the calls and we sign posted and gave workers information on accessing

- Legal aid immigration advice
- Social Services
- Women's Aid outreach and IRIS services
- WAST (Women Asylum Seekers Together)
- Shelter
- Community Care solicitors
- Europa - European advice worker
- Rights of Women advice line

One of the important outcomes of the phone and advice work of Safety4Sisters was the continual sharing of knowledge and advice to other agencies to support them to best support the women in their service. We recorded that in 23 cases such agencies had been able to access more information on the immigration system and how the women's immigration status effected the support of their clients. We also acknowledged that there is so much more work and training that needs to be done particularly for frontline workers in a broad range of voluntary and statutory services that women came into contact with.

Increased Access to Justice

The Safety4Sisters project was very successful in ensuring that women accessed immigration advice either through the monthly Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit at the WAST (Women Asylum Seekers Together) drop-in or through carefully explained information on how and where advice drop ins were held around Greater Manchester. It was important to give women the bus fares to access these advice surgeries, explain what documents they needed to take and help them prepare their papers so they maximised the time spent with the solicitors. The uptake was high and our attention to this detail (and not just giving women a list of names and addresses) paid off. Safety4sisters also supported women to communicate more effectively with their existing solicitors and advise them on their rights in relation to the information the solicitors should be giving them. We encouraged women to ask questions of their solicitors particularly those who were already using private solicitors who often did the minimum and did not inform or explain anything to women.

- 68% accessed advocacy and advice and one to one support
- 57% of women accessed legal aid immigration advice for the first time

Maximization of Income

Supporting women who faced extreme poverty and destitution was an important part of the Safety4Sisters work so the all women were enabled to maximise their income depending on their situation;

All women who were entitled to state benefits when they were granted LTR were supported to access these benefits.

All women were supported with the continuation of benefits as they moved from the DDV concession onto the Set (DV) application.

Every women who was entitled to was supported to fill in a HC1 application for free health care.

6 women who were asylum seekers and without Home Office support were supported to secure Sec 95 support and accommodation.

3 European women who were referred into the service access to Europa and Cheetham Hill Advice Centre service drop in advice to sort out their benefit problems.

Safety4Sisters successfully challenged Social Services to support women with children whom we felt were on impossibly low level of subsistence payments and to ensure they were also started on this support when facing destitution.

Safety4Sisters advocated for women going into refuges to get financial support when they arrived destitute.

The 7 women who Safety4Sisters accommodated in local Bed & Breakfast accommodation were all supported financially through our emergency funds.

33 women accessed emergency food, clothing and toiletries and all women coming to the office were given travel expenses.

On some occasions relatives or friends who were on benefits themselves and struggling to keep women whose only safety option was to stay with them, were also given travel expenses and food.

Empowered Women

Safety4Sisters aimed to run a support service which was women centred, empowering women and it was evident that this approach worked successfully for many of the women. This was achieved through delivering rights based training workshops which were all relevant to the issues women were facing. These workshops were well attended and gave women a chance to look at their situations, feel more confident to challenge services and raise their expectations in relation to services they went to or would be going to for help in the future. Women were supported by the advice and advocacy service to challenge Local Authority decisions and as a result felt importantly that they were able to gain some control over their lives as often the control was continued by others in authority after they had managed to free themselves from abusive partners and husbands.

Three women were awarded a higher level of financial support from Social Services after accessing a Community Care solicitor instructed by Safety4Sisters. Three women were supported by Safety4Sisters around issues of child contact in order to secure and have more control over the degree of access they wanted the fathers of their children to have. Two women successfully legally challenged Local Authority decisions not to take responsibility for support of their family. Five women who had been threatened with having their children taken into care were supported and helped to challenge Local Authority workers. One woman successfully secured Social Services support as an adult with care needs under the Care Act when faced with homelessness due to her immigration status. Two women also put in police complaints in relation to how they had been treated.

Women were also encouraged to speak out, share their experiences and also if they wanted to, to take part in the Safety4Sisters awareness raising events. The Safety4Sisters film, which 8 of the women in the group took part in, was a great success. Through the film service providers were informed and educated by listening directly to women's experiences. It was also valuable for the women who took part in it who were given a voice in a safe and effective way. Many of the women took up these opportunities to speak out despite the stress they were under.

Secured Routes to Safety by:

Paying for Bed and Breakfast accommodation (between 1 and 3 weeks) for 7 women who were facing homelessness or return to the violent partner when no other agency was able to take responsibility for their safety.

Successfully advocated on behalf of a women in a women's hostel to avoid eviction because of her immigration issue and advocated on behalf of 2 other women to secure emergency payments on arrival at the refuge.

Advocating for 2 women to move into safe accommodation who were being left in hospital because no agency would take responsibility.

Advocating on behalf of 5 women when support workers, social workers and IDVA's (Independent Domestic Violence Advocate) thought they were unable to access refuge space because of their immigration status.

Supporting 8 women emotionally and practically through the process of leaving violent and abusive partners/husbands by ongoing support, advice and advocacy to secure refuge accommodation and another 7 women to secure Social Services accommodation.

Giving women ongoing support in the refuges so the refuge workers were able to understand their immigration issues and how these related to their safety.

Giving on going advice and support to 6 women in Home Office accommodation or staying with friends to ensure their safety in the accommodation following violence

Giving ongoing support and advice to 4 women who remained with perpetrators of violence until they felt safe to leave.

One woman had been told to return to her home country or go back to the perpetrator and with the support of Safety4sisters was able to argue the case of being the mother of a British child (Zambrano rights) and successfully accessed social services accommodation.

Recommendations for Best Practice - Based on some of Safety4Sisters Tried, Tested and Effective Work

- Explain confidentiality and where your service lies in relation to the Home Office.
- Meet woman face to face with documents, ask the right questions and be aware of possible types of immigration status - e.g. refugee, asylum seeker, on visas, over stayers, undocumented/ unidentified. Don't guess or always take as read what a non-legal referral agency thinks is the woman's status. When risk assessing, take time to listen well and be aware of both familial and intimate partner relationships within and outside the UK, and of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Honour Based Violence (HBV), Trafficking, Modern Day Slavery, Forced Marriage (FM) and child kidnapping/ abduction out of the country of a child.
- Document what the details of what the woman tells you carefully, especially on first meeting because this is the first piece of evidence she can use in the future.
- Check immediate physical needs and injuries and be aware that she may never have been to a hospital and may not know how an Accident and Emergency department operates. Ensure she has money to get there and back and food for a long wait.
- Be mindful of her emotional vulnerability, the effects of trauma and continuing high levels of stress and fear. Explore all possible avenues to address mental health issues and get appointments as soon as possible because waiting lists for counselling and specialist support are many months long.
- Address needs arising out of destitution: food, nappies, toiletries, bus fares, medication.
- Access immediate safe accommodation and keep all possibilities in mind: refuges, B&B, Social Services, asylum support, (sec 98 and possible applications for sec 95 & sec 4) women's hostels, safe friends.
- Support her to access a legal aid immigration lawyer, (direct and give bus fare to go or go with her) follow up to see what advice she is given.
- Give her a safe base, phone contact number and a regular meeting place to coordinate her support and keep her progress tracked with her.
- Support her to sign on with a doctor as soon as she can to access help with mental and physical health and for evidencing health issues arising from the violence. Explain the process and encourage her to apply for her Police Data records, Doctor's letters, MARAC records and if applicable and relevant, make a Home Office Subject Access as soon as is possible to use as evidence. Be aware that she may have Home Office deadlines and these records take time to come back. Use Community Care lawyers to support challenges to Social Services support levels or responsibilities if you feel they might be in breach of her Human Rights.
- Use interpreters when needed.
- Don't presume she knows how systems and agencies work, such as how to present as homeless and what to say. Ring the agencies in advance if you are sign posting her, give clear instructions, give her back up numbers to ring in case she is lost or confused.

- Don't ring the Home Office before she has had immigration advice.
- Explain the immigration system relevant to her situation.
- Explain her rights as a woman and the role of the police. Bear in mind when making arrangements with her that she may never have been allowed to use public transport or been out alone before and the implications this has on her ability to access services or be sign posted.
- Don't make assumptions about her religious practices and beliefs and whether she has a faith or not.
- Be mindful that women may be fearful of using faith based approaches that use mediation as a technique to deal with violence. Women's interests are not protected when they are pressured into using mediation and they will be placed in further danger.
- Don't use the immigration system against the perpetrator to protect her; there are civil and criminal law solutions.
- Be aware of racism in the institutions she needs help from and particularly be aware of the perceptions and experiences she may have had of the police, both as a migrant, minoritised woman in the UK, as well as in her country of origin.
- When taking phone referrals, don't presume she will ring again. Get as much detail as possible and give her as much information as possible in the first call, she may not be able to ring again.
- Try to follow up calls and give her information on a physical place of contact where she can go to follow up your advice or access face to face help and support from other non-phone line based specialist services.
- Work with her to find out the most suitable type of specialist agency or support that could be relevant to her needs before sign posting her on to what you think she fits into. It may be a specialist phone line in London for one specific ethnic group of women or could just be a local friend in the neighbourhood whom she trusts and speaks her language.
- Remember it is important how you make her feel; valued, respected, believed as well as how you can best support her to be safe.

Don't give up, leave no woman behind

Conclusion and Key Recommendations

The following recommendations are aimed at all service providers, practitioners and service managers who come into contact with migrant women.

Put the safety and rights of women ahead of immigration enforcement

Safety should be seen as the priority in all responses relating to working with migrant women with insecure immigration status. This includes the need for access to emergency safe accommodation away from gender based violence regardless of immigration status and prior to any further action.

Safe specialist refuge accommodation should be sourced to house migrant women regardless of eligibility to welfare benefits and practitioners involved in women's cases should advocate the enablement of this practice. An empathic and women centred approach should be fostered so that trust with migrant communities is increased and women will be more likely to report violence and abuse.

Women to be at the heart of the response

Ensure that women are kept informed on all action and referrals made. Make sure that a woman centred approach is adopted that prioritises the needs and perspectives of women, including the decision of whether or not to turn to the authorities for help. If women are fearful of being penalised for doing so, it is important to understand why this may be the case. They may have little confidence in the system or feel that engagement with the system will leave them worse off. E.g. that children will be taken into care or that they will be left destitute.

Training front-line staff and managers

Front-line staff, practitioners and managers should undertake mandatory training on the issues, rights, experiences and barriers faced by migrant women with insecure immigration status.

Link in with migrant rights networks/ civil society immigration support groups and those with experience in delivering support to migrant women, including agencies such as Safety4Sisters.

Empowerment of women to exercise their rights

Ensure that women get immediate, legally aided, quality immigration advice to address their immigration matters. Enable access to advice on family, civil and criminal matters so that women can make considered decisions about their situations. Keep in touch with women to ensure that they understand their rights and the consequences of exercising these.

Work with migrant women's rights organisations and other members of civil society to make certain that vulnerable migrant women are aware of their rights.

Physical accessibility, free, confidential and safe support in a trusted space

Ensure that your service enables women to talk about their situations in safe, accessible and confidential spaces.

Address the barriers to protections and justice

Assist migrant women to navigate complicated legal, criminal, welfare and immigration processes. Help them to document the abuse, gather essential evidence, access relevant experts, solicitors and practitioners and facilitate dealings with state or local agencies.

Establish a central agency to act as a hub point as women often have a multitude of agencies involved in their cases which can be confusing.

Ensure that insecure immigration status does not bar women from protections and justice

A woman's safety is the priority, not her immigration status. Ensure that in all responses taken with regards to her situation, her safety is paramount whilst providing her with access to all legal remedies necessary.

If a woman requires safe, specialist refuge accommodation, action should be taken to guarantee that she has access to this during the time that measures are being implemented to regularise her immigration status.

If you are an accommodation provider, research ways in which you can fund raise, secure funding for and authorise migrant women's access to your service.

If you are a commissioner of services, include migrant women's experiences within your assessment of service provision including their need for safe refuge or emergency based accommodation.

Ensure that women's mental health needs are addressed

The impact on migrant women's mental and psychological health is often overlooked. It is essential that all early interventions include referrals to mental health support as a priority, strengthening emotional resilience through a variety of specialist group work support, therapy and counselling.

Link in and support campaigning activities

As we work towards finding a long-term solution to supporting migrant women with no recourse to public funds experiencing gender based violence, we urge all agencies to take part in campaigning activities in order to minimise the risk of vulnerable women being forced to make choices between living in violence or facing deportation or destitution.

Wider Campaigning Recommendations

Reinstate legal aid for all victims of domestic abuse.

Ring fence funding for specialist refuge accommodation, specifically for women survivors of gender based violence. National and local authorities should ensure sufficient resources are made available to finance programs that provide adequate levels of support, including specialised support, for migrant women experiencing gender based violence. This includes assistance for refuges to permit migrant women to obtain reimbursement for services provided. These resources could be provided by government agencies or by civil society.

Extend the concession to the "no recourse to the public funds" policy to all women who are subjected to gender based violence and exploitation, not just those on spousal visas.

Improve the implementation of the DDV concession by extending it to six months and extend the range of evidence needed for Set DV applications. Give equal weight to specialist support agency evidence and not rely solely on police and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) Reports.

All women should have the right to safety and protections to live free from violence

Organisations that we used during the pilot project

Platform for the International Cooperation of Undocumented Migrant (PICUM)

www.picum.org

Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit

www.gmiau.org

Rights of Women

www.rightsofwomen.org.uk

Project 17

www.project17.org.uk

No Recourse to Public Funds Network

www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk

Homeless Link

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/supporting-people-with-no-recourse-to-public-funds

ASHA

www.ashamanchester.wordpress.com

UKBA

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-visas-and-immigration

Aire Centre

www.airecentre.org

End the Fear

www.endthefear.co.uk

UNHCR

www.unhcr.org/uk

Women Against Violence in Europe (WAVE)

www.wave-network.org

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)

www.cpag.org.uk

Refugee Action

www.refugee-action.org.uk

Southall Black Sisters

www.southallblacksisters.org.uk

Women's Domestic Abuse Helpline

wdchoices.org.uk

To get a Subject Access Request from Manchester GMP

www.gmp.police.uk/content/section.html?readform&s=C7C0E9EC577F528180257A8E004D5279

Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation

www.ikwro.org.uk

Safety is a Right Not a Privilege



Safety4Sisters Northwest
77 Ada House
Thompson Street
Manchester
M4 5FY Tel - 0161 464 9505
Email Safety4Sisters@gmail.com

Designed by Union Street Media Arts
Printed by Marc Printers

