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## **Why women's domestic violence refuges are not local services**

### **Abstract**

In a context of Localism and public sector cuts in the United Kingdom, women's domestic violence refuges are experiencing funding cuts and service restrictions. This article presents findings of a research project, quantifying, mapping and conceptualising the journeys women make to escape domestic violence; journeys which often include accessing a women's refuge. Analysing administrative, survey and interview data it provides evidence of women travelling from everywhere to all types of places to access refuges, and that refuges are distinctively accessed across local authority boundaries. As a result, it is argued that women's refuges should not be considered, planned and funded as local services; but as regional and national services, hosted locally.

### **Key words**

Housing; Internal migration; Journeys; Localism; Violence against women

## Introduction

Current austerity measures in the United Kingdom include shifting central/local government relationships via a new 'Localism' which talks of local councils having more power to meet the needs of local people (DCLG, 2010, 2011). Whilst there is a long history of localism agendas (Clarke, 2013; Evans et al., 2013a, 2013b, 2013c), this current version combines a rhetoric of devolution of power to local government with significant cuts to local government funding (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013). This paper examines the implications of this localism agenda for women and children who need to relocate due to domestic violence.

Since the 1970s there have been women's domestic violence refuges providing temporary accommodation, and a range of support services, in many local authorities. Women's refuges are distinctive services that enable women and their children to relocate to escape domestic violence; and enable them to relocate to a place where they do not have an existing local connection. Women may also relocate without using publically-funded accommodation services, and others may escape the violence without relocating (Ponic et al., 2011); but this article draws on specific research on the domestic violence journeys that include accessing refuges. It should also be noted that women's refuges provide a range of support services over and above accommodation (WAVE, 2002, 2004; Warrington, 2003), and that this specialist support enables women and children to access their rights and recover from the abuse (Abrahams, 2007, 2010). In addition, women and children may access a wide range of non-accommodation services, from both independent women's organisations and statutory and voluntary sector providers, which are not discussed here.

Women's refuges have been set up and continue to be funded in a variety of ways. However, the Supporting People Programme (ODPM, 2002a, 2002b) from 2003 to 2011 (ring-fenced from 2003-2009) provided greater standardisation in England, and increased provision and capacity in some areas. In addition to increasing provision in local areas, the Supporting People Programme also specifically recognised the need for cross-authority access to housing support for women at risk of domestic violence (Fusco, 2007). However, domestic violence responses have largely continued to focus on the local scale, emphasising local approaches and local service commissioning (HM Government, 2014: 12). This makes women's refuges particularly vulnerable to local funding cuts for three reasons. Firstly, women's refuges are not statutory services for local authorities and, as recent research in London shows (Fitzgerald and Lupton, 2014), local government is particularly reducing discretionary services. Secondly, there has been a lack of an evidence base on how women access refuges as distinct from other support services; and thirdly, because of how women use refuges, local cuts to refuges do not primarily have a local impact.

This paper addresses the second and third points, providing evidence on how women use refuges in their relocation journeys, and discussing how such locally-expressed needs cannot be met at the purely local scale. Whilst evidence-based policy has been presented by successive governments as a rationality discourse, Jacobs and Manzi (2013a) have argued that this often disguises the ideology embedded in the processes whereby evidence is collected and analysed. They claim that evidence based policy does not easily translate into contexts where there is a lack of agreement as to the causal factors that accentuate problems. To the extent that there has been an evidence-based response to domestic violence, it has focused on "supporting effective local approaches" (HM Government, 2014: 12) rather than

examining the premise that locally-expressed needs have either local causes or local solutions.

The evidence base on women and children's relocation journeys to escape domestic violence has been limited, and is therefore the focus of this research. The domestic violence literature focuses on leaving the abuse (from, for example, Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Kirkwood, 1993; to Ponice et al., 2011), the role of services such as women's refuges (from, for example, Pahl, 1978; Binney et al., 1981; to Abrahams, 2007), and resettlement after abuse (for example, Humphreys and Thiara, 2002; Kelly et al., 2014); but it has not examined the journeys between these points. It has been far more likely to employ metaphors of emotional and healing journeys (for example, Davis et al., 2001; Smith, 2003; Queen et al., 2009), and discuss women 'moving on' from violence (for example, Morgan, 2006). Whilst such concepts of space and place may be positively engaged with, and have been discussed elsewhere (Bowstead, 2011), there is a risk that they also obscure the actual movement of women and children around the country. For example, a recent policy report on domestic abuse from the Centre for Social Justice (which is closely associated with the UK Coalition Government) (Farmer and Callan, 2012) contained no references to women's journeys, travel or relocation due to domestic violence, but numerous references to women and children needing to move on from the abuse.

The invisibility of these journeys makes them particularly sensitive to the impact of localism. A localism agenda that assumes a homogeneity of local needs will tailor services to the settled majority (Featherstone et al., 2012; Clarke and Cochrane, 2013); whereas women and children relocating due to domestic violence are both minorities and new arrivals (Parvin, 2009) and therefore vulnerable to exclusion under local policies. Both social housing policy

(for example, Hodkinson et al., 2013; Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013) and Austerity and Localism (for example, Corbett and Walker, 2013; Ginsburg et al., 2012; Hancock et al., 2012; Levitas, 2012) have been recently discussed in this journal, and this article seeks to examine specific issues of domestic violence policy and provision in this context. In the same way as Drakeford and Davidson (2013) have examined the devolution of central state obligations in poverty relief and income maintenance to local authorities in England, this article questions the central/local responsibilities in women's refuge provision. Ishkanian (2014) has detailed the impact of the Big Society agenda, alongside public spending cuts, on the domestic violence sector in England, and Towers and Walby (2012) have highlighted the deep and disproportionate funding cuts on services to prevent violence against women and girls. However, Ishkanian (2014: 8) questions the capacity and expertise of local communities "to take over the running of services", and "whether national commitments to fighting violence are effectively being transmitted to and addressed at the local level" (2014: 9), rather than examining which services are/are not properly 'local'.

Despite some recognition that domestic violence forces women and children to relocate for safety, successive national governments have regarded women's refuges as local services and not provided national planning or funding to establish sufficient capacity or distribution around the country (Quilgars and Pleace, 2010). In addition, not all councils ever provided any specialist services (Coy et al., 2009), and those that do are increasingly cutting capacity and/or requiring quotas of local women. Jacobs and Manzi (2013b: 39) "raise the question as to what scale the "local" should operate", and this can be placed within the principle of subsidiarity (HMSO, 2010), whereby government power should reside at the lowest feasible level (Cox, 2014). The question is therefore what the lowest feasible level of government is, for any particular service provision or social issue; as Moore and McKee (2014) have

discussed in questioning whether the local scale is the most appropriate at which to intervene on issues of poverty and inequality. Inappropriately perceiving needs to be local in character (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013), and attempting to intervene at too local a scale will be both ineffective in addressing the needs, and ensure that local decisions affect those beyond the area. As Purcell (2006: 1921) argues, “it is critical to think carefully and strategically about scale” rather than assuming that the local scale is preferable to other scales. This article argues that the lack of understanding of the scale of women’s domestic violence journeys - and the service needs that arise from them - has led to an incorrect analysis of the lowest feasible level of effective service responses, and specifically an assumption that women’s refuges are local services.

The next section outlines the methodology of the research project on which this argument is based; and the following sections detail the findings in terms of the nature and extent of women’s domestic violence journeys. These include women trying not to change place, and the overall process of spatial churn; as well as the lack of significance of demographic categories on the patterns of journeys, and the role of different types of service provision. The implications for policy and services of these journeys are then discussed, in relation to the extent to which women remain local if they can; and the distinctive role of women’s refuges as national/local services. Finally, the article concludes by summarising the evidence on women’s domestic violence journeys, and the consequent need to rethink the scale at which refuges are planned and funded.

## **Methodology**

The analysis presented in this paper is based on a mixed methods research project involving analysis and mapping of six years of administrative data (2003-2009) from housing-related support services in England, interviews with 20 women in seven locations in the Midlands, South Coast and London, groupwork with nine women in the Midlands and South Coast, surveys with 34 women in domestic violence services and on 267 calls to the National Domestic Violence Helpline, and interviews with workers in services in eight locations.

The administrative data are from the Client Record system of the Supporting People Programme (ODPM, 2002b; Supporting People, 2008), identifying “Women at risk of domestic violence” who changed accommodation at the point of accessing a housing-related support service. This gave a total of approximately 19,000 cases per year, with around 10,000 women (over half with children) migrating across local authority boundaries to access services and nearly 9,000 relocating within their local authority (i.e. residential mobility). The annual datasets were processed to generate flow maps (see Figure 1) of straight-line journeys between local authorities; and were also aggregated per local authority (354 English Local Authorities, District and Unitary, 2001 boundaries) to generate choropleth maps of rates of leaving, arriving, residential mobility and net leaving (see Figure 2). Interviews and groupwork with women and workers were carried out via the specialist domestic violence service provider Refuge in a range of locations in the Midlands, London and Southern England. A purposive non-probability sample of women with a range of different ages (18-56), ethnic origins, disabilities, and with or without children was interviewed, and anonymised quotations are included in this article.

The range of data sources was brought together in analysis to explore the nature of women’s journeys at a range of scales from individual to local, regional and national (Bowstead, 2015).

The following sections will discuss aspects of these journeys which raise particular policy and service issues: trying not to change place, the overall process of spatial churn, the lack of significance of demographic categories, and the role of service provision on the journeys.

## **The nature and extent of women's domestic violence journeys**

### ***Trying not to change place***

Domestic violence journeys are a part of women's strategies to achieve safety from an abusive partner, and it is clear that they are not embarked upon lightly. The survey (n=34) with women in domestic violence services (not just refuges) indicated that in women's attempts to separate from their partner they used a range of actions to increase their safety to be able to stay put. Up to a fifth had tried the Sanctuary Scheme of enhanced security on their home and increased support (17.6%), Civil Legal Orders (14.7%), or supporting a Criminal Case against the perpetrator (20.6%). And at the point of the survey, 80 per cent of the women who had tried each of these measures had not had to relocate. However, the inadequacies of local and statutory responses to domestic violence have been widely recognised for decades (for example, Hester and Westmarland, 2005; Gadd, 2012; HMIC, 2014), and it is not always possible for women and children to stay put and stay safe, even with intensive support and enhanced security (Jones et al., 2010).

Amongst women who do relocate, many stay relatively local. In the administrative data, three-quarters of local authorities recorded women making relocation journeys within their area, and 45.6 per cent of woman-journeys to access services were journeys of residential mobility (n=8,533 in 2008-09). It is clear, from both this and the interview accounts, that



women experiencing domestic violence stay put – if they can – they stay local – if they have to move; and they only move outside their local authority if they are forced to do so.

All the interviewed women had lived with the abuse for months and usually years. Some had used formal measures to try to stop the abuse but not to move, including supporting criminal cases and taking out civil injunctions. However, they had not ultimately been able to stay put safely despite these measures. For example, Deborah's husband had been convicted of the assaults on her and had had to complete the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP) run by Probation; but she found that he still continued to threaten her. She stayed with him until she had got secure immigration status and her passport back from the Home Office.

*My husband had to go to IDAP, and after he did that he needed a statement from me about the abuse. He needed a statement for the residence – because of the criminal conviction. But once he got that he started abusing me again.*

*He started to text me fifteen times a day. I explained that I can't phone during work – I was doing lab. work so I couldn't phone. But he wouldn't listen.*

*And he said I had to dress differently – my office clothes – he said I had to wear long clothes. But I said I don't have any religious or cultural reasons – because I'm a Buddhist. I explained that I would look weird if I dressed like that at work – that I had no cultural reasons to do so.*

*He checked my phone and my handbag and he dialled the numbers. He had the phone contract under his name so he could set it up for messages to go to his e-mail.*

*[Deborah – a 29 year old woman of Asian Sri Lankan ethnic origin with a 5 year old son and 3 year old daughter. Living in a Midlands town at the time.]<sup>1</sup>*

Therefore, despite intensive statutory involvement in tackling Deborah's husband's violence, she and her children remained unsafe and she was forced to take her own action to leave her job and relocate out of London, to the only refuge space she could find – in the Midlands.

Overall, there were around 10,000 migration journeys a year (n=10,161 in 2008-09) to access services in England due to domestic violence. However, even though these journeys are across local authority boundaries, there is a significant tendency for women to be still trying not to change place, in that they travel to similar types of place to the ones left. For example, cross-tabulation of Rural-Urban Classification (DEFRA, 2009) of local authorities left and arrived in (n=9,205; Chi-Square = 2132.920 (df=25) p<0.01 Kendall's tau b = 0.310) shows a clear (statistically significant) tendency to migrate to similar types of local authorities to the one left. Urban women were most likely to go to accommodation services (primarily women's refuges) in other urban areas, and rural women most likely to go to other rural areas. They are travelling because of their individual need for safety, not because they would have otherwise wanted to move at all; and they therefore try to reduce the dislocation by going to the type of place they are familiar with. Women therefore leave all types of places, but also go to all types of places.

## ***The overall process of spatial churn***

Women leave everywhere due to domestic violence. Women are recorded as travelling from every English Local Authority, and from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and abroad, to access formal support services in England. They also go to every type of area, tending – as discussed above – to go to similar types of places to the ones they left. As a result, most local authorities have around the same number of women leaving and arriving per year. Therefore, despite around 10,000 migration journeys a year to access formal services in England, there is a lack of *net* effect at the local authority level. The more rural areas have lower rates per population, more deprived areas have higher rates, and areas with more specialist services have higher rates; but these are lower or higher rates of leaving *and* arriving. There are no strong flows between particular local authorities; in fact over 80 per cent of such journeys were only travelled by one or two women in a year. Figure 1 is a flow map of the journeys in 2008-2009 across and to services in central southern England, showing that the vast majority of journeys from local authority to local authority are travelled by only one woman per year. Even journeys to and from the major city of Birmingham (in the NW corner of the map) do not aggregate into strong flows to or from any other local authority.

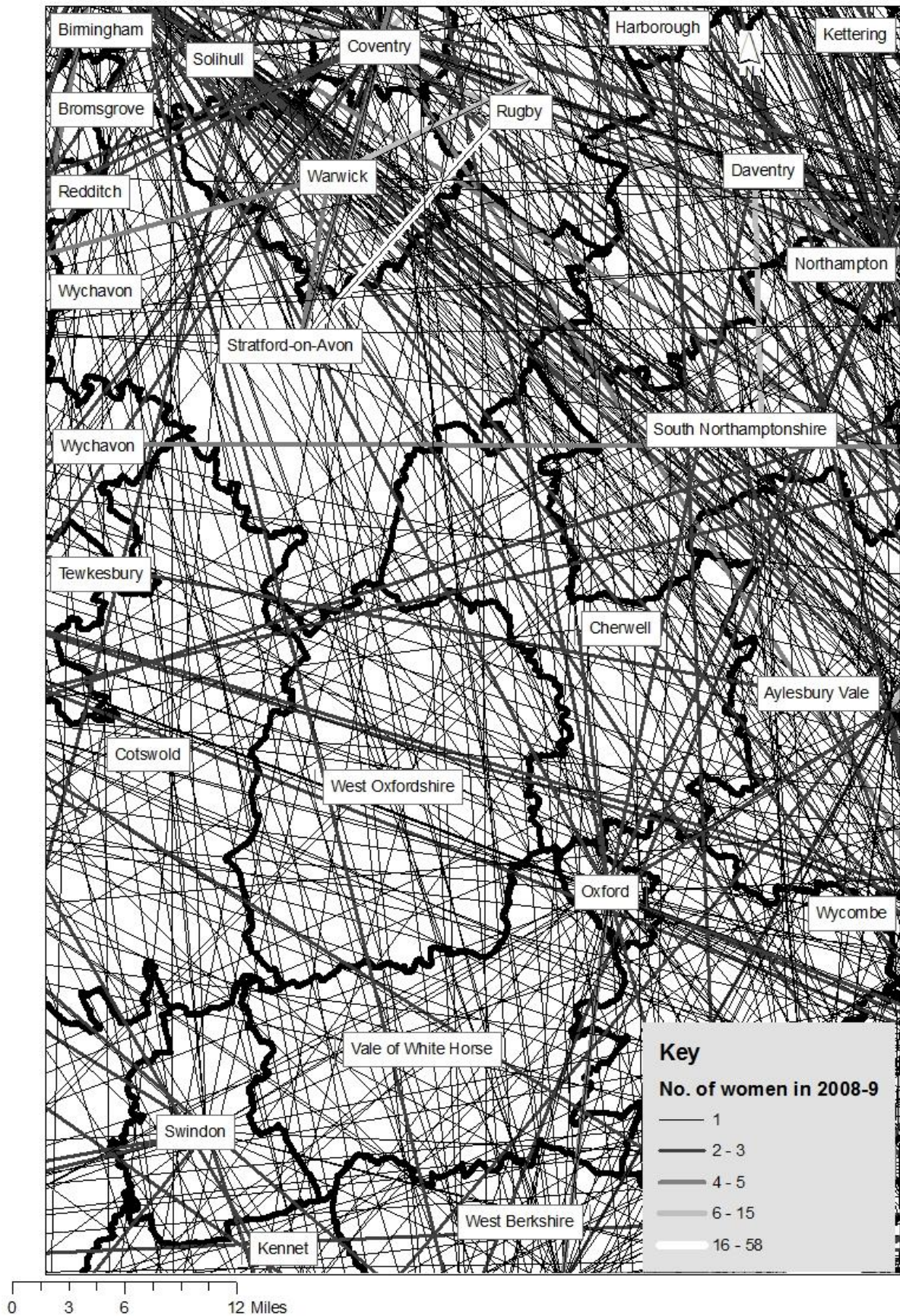


Figure 1: Flow map of Oxfordshire and surrounding areas

However, the lack of *net* effect is shown by this mass of individual journeys cancelling each other out at the local and national scale. Figure 2 shows the net rates of leaving/arriving for these same local authorities, and the mass migration has become almost invisible as the majority of local authorities have a net rate of around zero. The major city of Birmingham has over 200 women a year arriving in its services, and over 200 leaving to access services elsewhere (as well as over 350 relocating within the city); but has a similar net rate of leaving/arriving per population as the very rural West Oxfordshire with its actual numbers of women arriving and leaving in single figures per year. Both have a net rate of around zero. The thousands of domestic violence journeys – highly disruptive for the individual women and children concerned – cancel each other out in terms of net effect on a local or national scale. The overall process is one of spatial churn from everywhere to everywhere across the country; with very few local authorities being either significant net recipients of women, or net losers of women due to domestic violence. In Figure 2 there are no local authorities at the extremes of net arriving or leaving, and the majority are between  $\pm 3$  women per 10,000 female population (as are the majority of all local authorities in England).



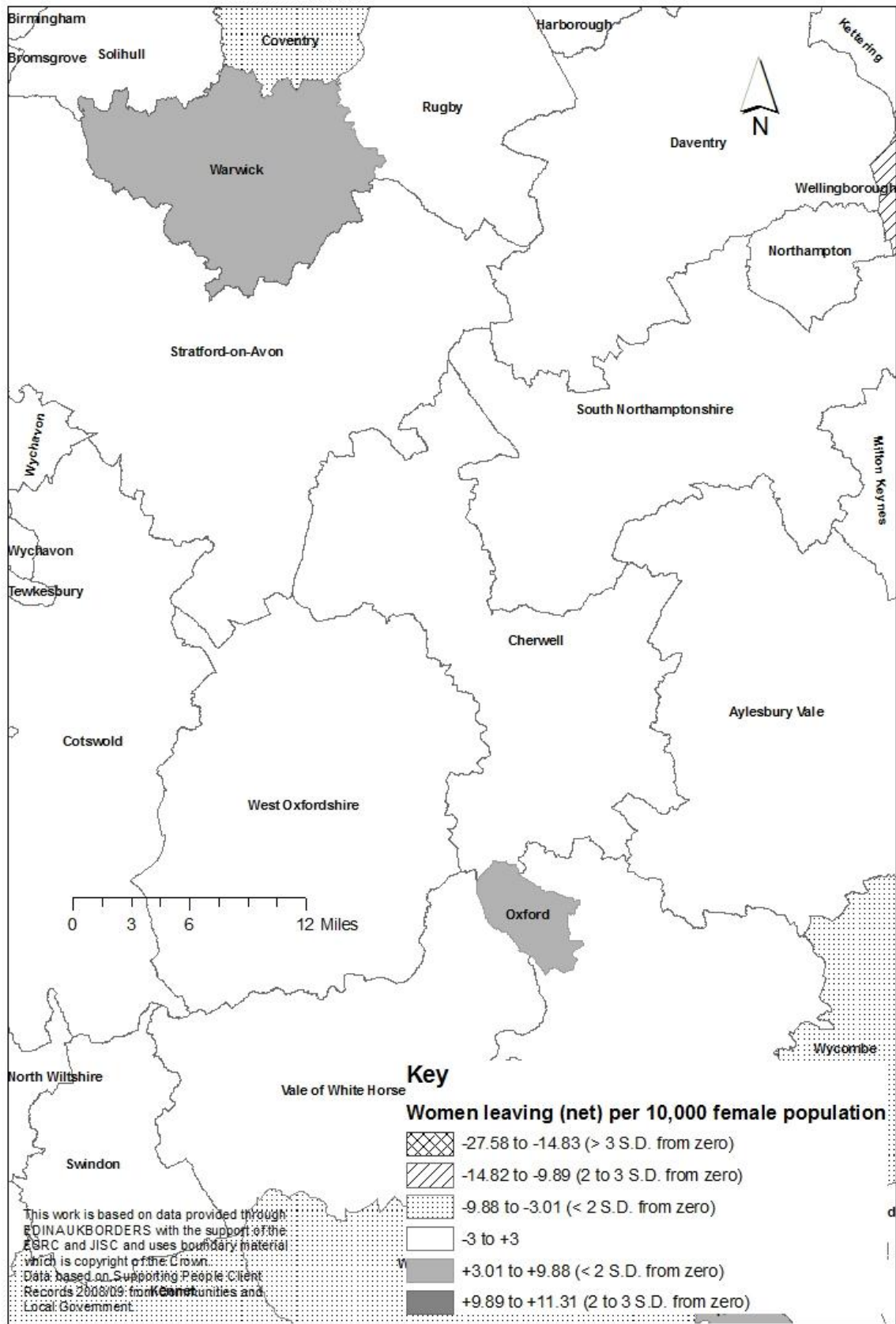


Figure 2: Local Authority map of net leaving/arriving in Oxfordshire and surrounding areas

Therefore, not only are women and children in every local authority experiencing domestic violence, they are seeking help from formal support services; and, as part of that help-seeking, many are accessing services outside their local authority area. However, all local authorities are affected by this, and most only assist non-local women to the same extent that their local women access services elsewhere. All local authorities benefit from this informal reciprocity – other local authorities assisting their women and children who are unable to stay put or stay local – though there is no national planning of domestic violence service locations and capacity.

### ***The lack of significance of demographic categories***

Domestic violence journeys are not only very individual in terms of places left and arrived in, there is also little association of where and how far travelled with any demographic categories. This is apart from the fact that these journeys are highly gendered. All journeys to women's refuges are necessarily made by women; but the vast majority of journeys to access any kind of support service due to domestic violence are made by women. In 2009-2010, of all people relocating to access any type of Supporting People support service in England due to domestic violence (n=18,232) only 1.3 per cent (n=241) were male.

All types of women were travelling from all types of places to all types of places. In 2008-2009, women were aged from 15 to 88, with a mean age of nearly 31, 53.9 per cent had children with them, and 8.2 per cent were disabled (the Supporting People records included no data on sexual orientation). Women came from all ethnic origins (using the census categories), with 67.4 per cent being White British. (see Figures 3 and 4).

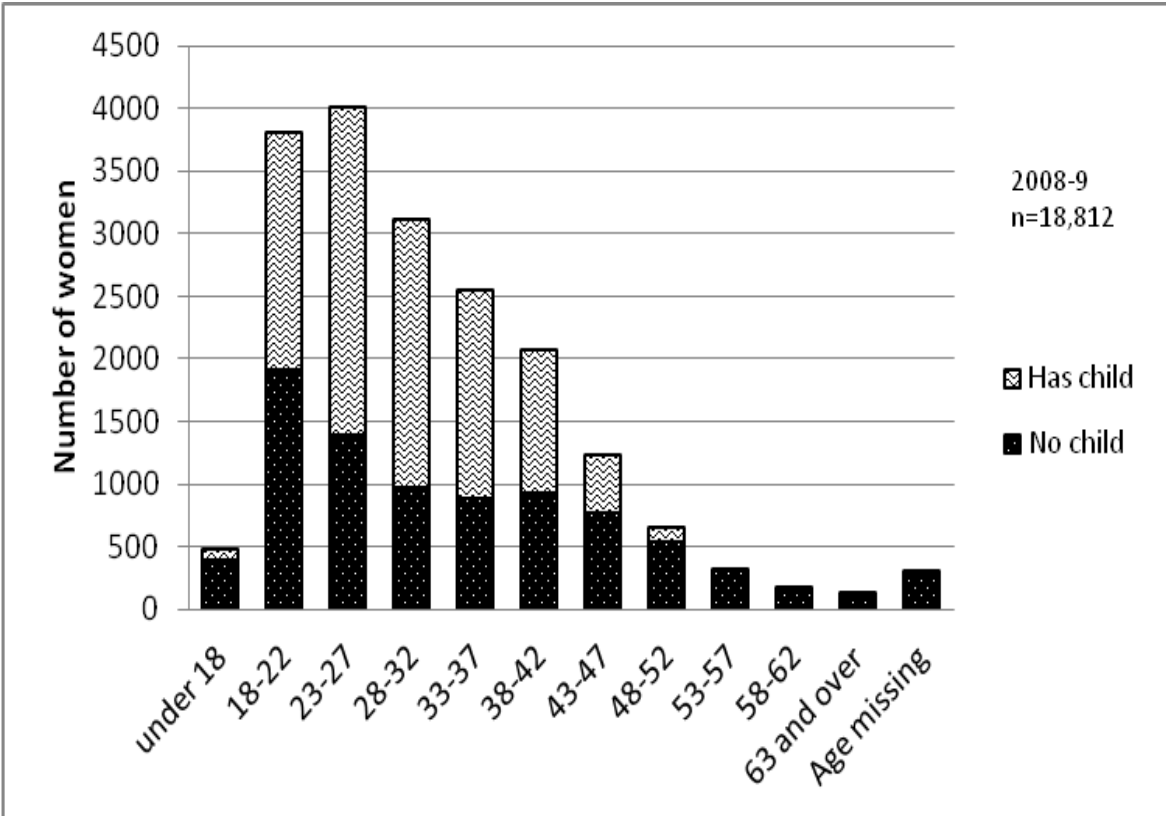


Figure 3: Graph of age of women with and without children who relocated 2008-9

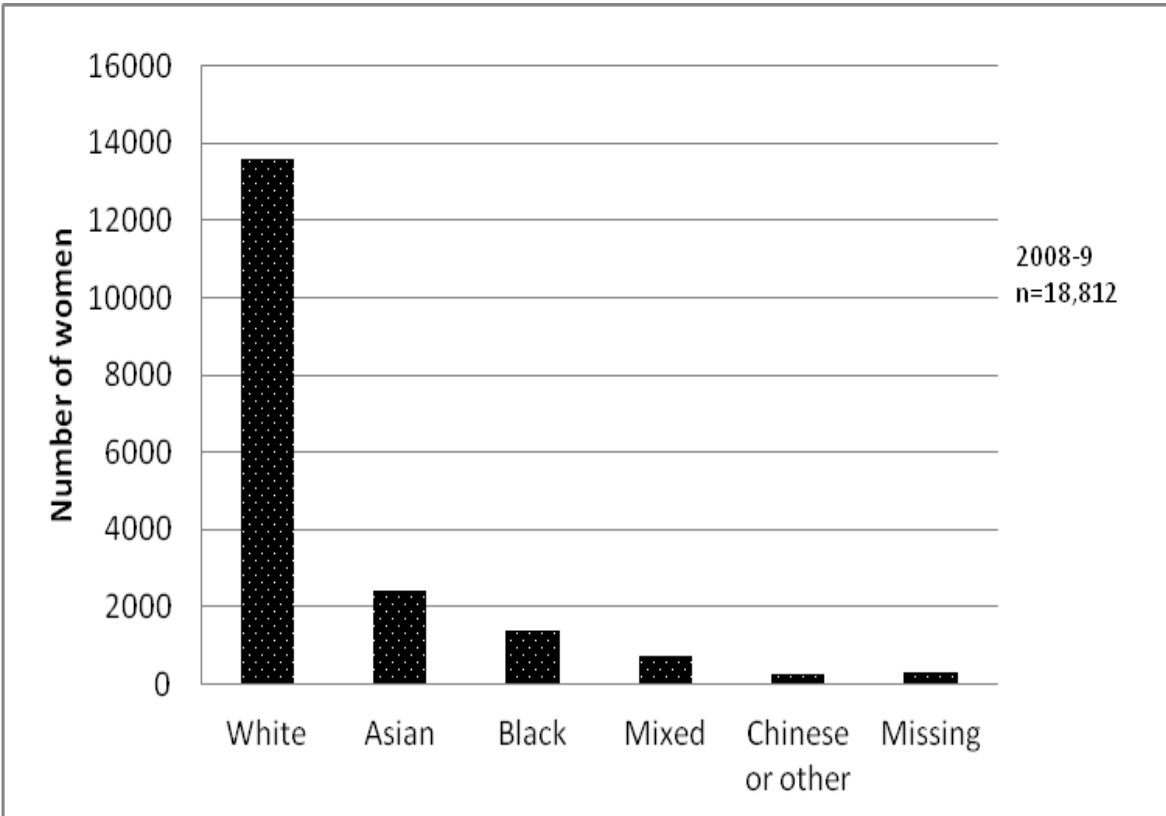


Figure 4: Graph of ethnic origin of women who relocated 2008-9



However, statistical analysis indicated only very weak associations between any demographic characteristics of women and the distances travelled, and whether or not they migrated across local authority boundaries. This suggests that factors such as individual circumstances are more important in determining such journeys, rather than broader demographic characteristics. Demographic characteristics are therefore not a clear predictor of whether or not women stay local or travel to other local authorities to access services; or how far they travel if they do cross boundaries. The interview accounts also indicated very individual factors in where women went; with the focus initially on just needing to be somewhere safe.

*I didn't mind wherever they put me – I just wanted somewhere I could go and sleep with my baby; and just put my head to sleep without walking on eggshells, without the door opening and you jumping – oh my God, he's here! You know all those feelings when you are afraid of somebody and scared of somebody – somebody who's so unpredictable. I just wanted to go somewhere and just sit down and rest – because I was so tired; I wasn't sleeping for days and days – I was in such a state of mind.*

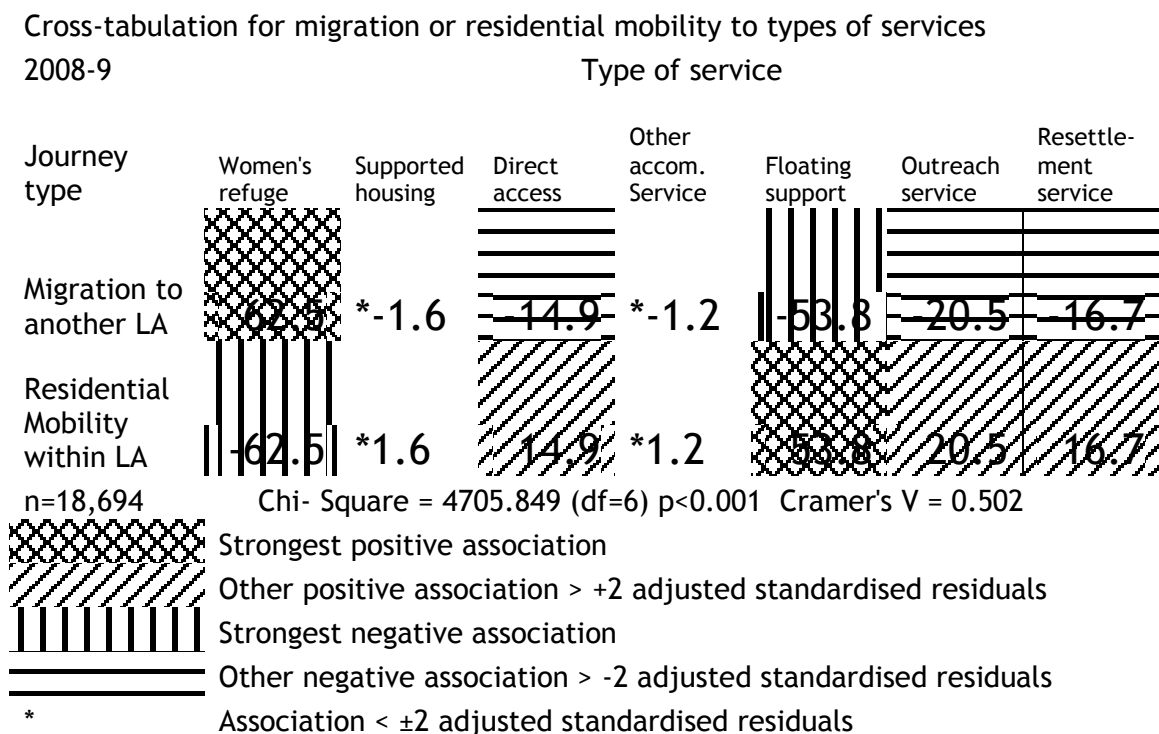
*[Gloria – a 41 year old woman of Black African ethnic origin with a 1 year old son. Living in a South Coast small town at the time.]*

### ***The role of service provision on the journeys***

Where women who access services go is influenced by where those services are, with many women struggling to find emergency accommodation at the time that they need it. In the survey on calls to the National Domestic Violence Helpline (n=267), over a quarter of

women (26.2%) who, by the end of the call, wanted to relocate immediately were not able to be offered *any* service place to go to by the Helpline. Women’s refuges are the type of service most likely to be accessed, being by far the largest category of service accessed by migration (8,302 – 82% - in 2008-9) and almost the largest category of services accessed by residential mobility (3,157 – 37% - in 2008-9). Women’s refuges were strongly the most likely services that women would migrate across Local Authority boundaries to access, as well as to travel the furthest to, indicating that such services are an important means by which women travelled the longest distances away from their origin area. Table 1 shows that journeys to women’s refuges were strongly associated with migration from another local authority (a.r. = +62.5) whilst all other types of services (accommodation-based or not) are relatively associated with journeys of residential mobility; Floating Support particularly strongly so.

Table 1: Cross-tabulation for migration or residential mobility to types of services



Women’s refuges are therefore not only the most common type of service women access when they relocate (n=11,459 in 2008-9), they are distinctive in being accessed primarily from across local authority boundaries. As has been found in other research (Quilgars and Pleace, 2010), and as Figure 5 shows, over 70 per cent of woman-journeys to women’s refuges are from outside the local authority, in comparison to, for example, 15 per cent for direct access accommodation and 16 per cent for floating support services. It is therefore problematic – in policy and funding terms – to think of women’s refuges as local services at all.

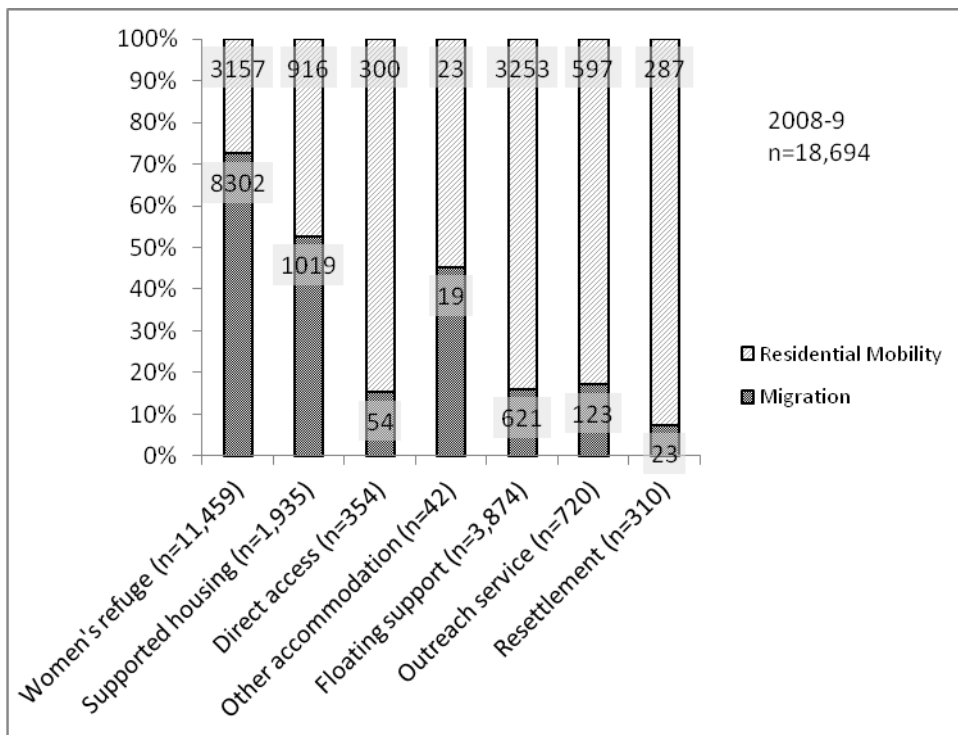


Figure 5: Graph of proportion of migration or residential mobility to types of services

However, it is not that the existence of women’s refuges causes women’s migration journeys. Research by Coy et al (2009) mapped the presence of specialist domestic violence services in local authorities; and the research reported here was able to use those data to analyse if the presence of services was associated with more women arriving to access them. It was found

that local authorities with more specialist services tend to have higher rates of residential mobility and leaving, as well as somewhat higher rates of arriving; and the association is strongest for rates of leaving *not* arriving. This suggests that the presence of services does not simply enable (or even encourage) women to arrive; but that services also assist women living in the area to take appropriate options – whether to relocate locally or to move elsewhere. The role of specialist services is that they provide women with options, and support them through their journeys; they promote women’s agency – their “space for action” (Lundgren, 1998). Floating support, outreach, resettlement and direct access services primarily support women who have relocated but stayed local – supporting over 80 per cent residential mobility; however, the role of women’s refuges is strongly associated with migration journeys across local authority boundaries.

## **Implications for policy and services**

This detailed analysis of women’s domestic violence journeys reveals the extent and nature of the journeys – the distances, patterns and places. It provides evidence of what is going on, with a range of implications for policies and practice. Specifically, in the context of Localism, it highlights a fundamental mismatch between the notion of women’s refuges as local services, and the actual ways in which women access refuges, and use refuges as part of their strategies for safety. Firstly, it is clear that women are practising localism if they can: they stay put if they can, stay local if they do have to relocate; and only cross local authority boundaries if they have to. Secondly, women’s refuges are essential in enabling tens of thousands of women and children to escape domestic violence, but their ability to do so is

systematically reduced by their designation as local services. These two points are discussed next.

### ***Women practise Localism if they can***

Domestic violence occurs everywhere, and women and children are therefore seeking help in every local authority. If their needs can be met locally, then they stay local; but this is not just an assessment of whether support services exist in a local area, but whether it is safe to stay local to access support services at all. Women are practising Localism if they can, but they are making a complex and dynamic judgement based on the needs and safety of themselves, and often children as well, and are forced into decisions by the abuse. Such decisions are very individual, and often made in considerable isolation, with women unaware of their rights and options.

*I'd already made my decision years ago to go; but I always ended up going back – not because I liked him, but because I had nowhere to go.*

*I didn't know that I'd be able to be accepted into a refuge because I don't have children; so I didn't think I'd be able to find any help at all.*

*[Cathy – a 46 year old woman of Black Caribbean ethnic origin. Living in West London at the time.]*

Many try to access civil and criminal protection, to enable them to stay put, but many thousands are forced to relocate every year. The analysis in the research reported here

provides evidence that, not only do women try to stay local, but – if they cannot - they tend to relocate to the same type of place as they were forced to leave. Domestic violence journeys are not about wanting to change place.

As a result, when women do have to change place, they would want to go to all types of places. It is not that there are strong flows along transport routes, or to services in larger urban areas. In fact, major cities – including London – are places of net leaving due to domestic violence. It is therefore important that there are support services and effective statutory, including Police, responses in all areas, to enable those women who can stay put or stay local to do so. However, the experiences of women who have tried to do so, but been harassed, threatened, tracked down, or otherwise prevented from staying safe (Humphreys and Thiara, 2003), indicates that many will still need to relocate across local authority boundaries. So, there need to be appropriate services in all types of places to enable them to carry out their safety strategies and access the support they need.

### ***Women's refuges as national/local services***

Through the analysis and mapping at different scales, this research has been able to identify the different patterns and processes at the individual scale, in contrast to locally and nationally. The differences between residential mobility and migration have been under-recognised, with local authorities aware of women from elsewhere trying to access the services they fund but being completely unaware of where their local women go. In fact, migration due to domestic violence requires distinctively different types of service to the services required by women and their children who can stay put or stay local. If women do

not have to move at all, or can stay within the same local authority, then they may well still need support to undo the harm of the abuse, and assistance through court cases, for example, but they are much less likely to need to access a refuge, with the disruption and loss of possessions that often entails. As Figure 5 shows, thousands of women a year relocate within a local authority and access Floating Support due to the domestic violence. Local authorities should therefore, quite properly, be funding services for the needs of women and children forced into residential mobility due to domestic violence. And such services may appropriately vary from place to place, as the needs may differ between geographically large rural areas and compact urban areas, and in terms of local populations with particular language or cultural needs, for example.

However, women's refuges are a distinctive service, primarily for women who have not been able to stay local. As discussed earlier, refuges cannot properly be considered as local services at all, since over 70 per cent of women who access them have crossed local authority boundaries to do so. However, they are currently largely funded as if they were local services, and local authorities are caught in this fundamental dilemma. Some are increasingly dealing with the mismatch by forcing refuges to become more locally-focused; particularly by requiring refuges to admit a quota of local women, and hold rooms empty rather than admit a woman from elsewhere. Such policies distort the principles of the needs-based approach of women's refuges, by both refusing refuge to women and children in need, and requiring women to seek refuge more locally than they would otherwise judge to be safe. In seeking a refuge space, rather than other forms of support around domestic violence, women have generally already tried and/or ruled out the options of staying put or staying local.

Women's refuges, more than any other type of service, enable women to travel as far as they need to, whilst staying as near as they can. They support women's agency in escaping the violence, but resisting further dislocation; and enable women to begin to regain some control over their lives. Accessing a refuge does not mark the end of their journeys away from violence, but is an important stage in that process; and it is therefore important that they are available in all types of places, across the country. Refuges are national services – and need to be planned and funded as such – though they need to be hosted locally. It may be that they are best planned regionally, and there has been the beginning of such thinking in London (MOPAC, 2013a: 27, 2013b), but the current situation is that they are planned by local authorities, or sometimes counties. These authorities are unable to consider the informal reciprocity evidenced above, and the fact that most local authorities have a net rate of accessing services of around zero; and therefore make local funding decisions as if they are unduly burdened by women arriving from elsewhere.

Some local authorities never provided women's refuges, and others have cut back or closed provision; and the campaigns against this have tended to argue that local women will have nowhere to go to escape violence (for example, BBC, 2014). In fact, the closure of other domestic violence support services would affect local women, but the closure of a refuge would primarily affect women from elsewhere; and local women would be just as able to access refuges as before – because they would probably be travelling to another local authority. It is therefore not just an issue of public sector cuts, it is an issue of a fundamental category error as to who a women's refuge in any locality actually serves. Local funding cuts reduce overall refuge capacity, rather than particularly for local women and children; and cuts and quotas restrict refuges' ability to carry out their essential and distinctive role of supporting women who cannot stay local.



This is not to argue that refuge capacity across the country was ever sufficient, or that there was an evidence-based distribution around the country. There was not. But local funding decisions on women's refuges will never provide an appropriate service, when and where women need it. The evidence of this research is that refuges are being planned and funded at the wrong scale. Rather than losing refuges by a thousand local cuts, we need to redefine refuges as a locally-distributed regional and national provision. Whilst Coalition Government rhetoric and legislation emphasises a shift of responsibilities from national to local, the actual picture is more complex. For example, on 28 June 2013 the Department of Health announced new national eligibility criteria from 2015 to set a minimum threshold for adult care and support services provided by local authorities to "tackle the variations between local authorities which leads to inconsistencies, confusion and legal challenges" (HM Government, 2013). A similar recognition of the need for national standard-setting on women's refuges would therefore be possible. It would require a funding formula which recompenses local authorities for contributing to this national provision, which establishes provision in areas of the country where capacity is insufficient, and which holds local authorities to account for a provision they all benefit from, and all need to be maintained.

## **Conclusions**

This article has quantified and mapped women's domestic violence journeys to access services in England. From that analysis it has highlighted that women stay put if they can, stay local if they do have to relocate; and only cross local authority boundaries if they have to. However, tens of thousands of women and children relocate due to domestic violence, in a process of spatial churn across the country, and there is a need to re-think current

approaches to their accommodation. In comparison to other domestic violence support services, women's refuges are distinctively accessed across local authority boundaries and are distinctively vulnerable to local public sector funding cuts, being both non-statutory services, and primarily used by women and children who are non-local.

Local women and children everywhere need women's refuges; but they need them not in their original local area. Such needs are therefore currently being addressed at fundamentally the wrong scale. Women's domestic violence refuges are not local services, and should not be planned or funded as if they are. They are an essential national service that needs to be distributed regionally in all types of places, and hosted locally. Currently they are increasingly subject to local funding cuts, by local authorities that cannot take into account the informal reciprocity they all benefit from. Funding decisions are therefore being taken by the wrong level of government, which is dealing with it by either cutting services that are essential to women elsewhere, or restricting services to only local women, thereby distorting the distinctive role of refuges. Forcing refuges to operate at the wrong scale will never be effective in meeting women's and children's needs; and the effect across the country will be the loss of the services that enable women and children to escape domestic violence as far as they need to.

This article has argued that women's domestic violence refuges are not just threatened by funding cuts, they are threatened by a lack of recognition of how, why and where women need refuges as part of their safety strategies to escape violence. Consultation in June 2013 on the London Mayor's Strategy on Violence Against Women and Girls (MOPAC, 2013a: 27) reports "a consensus that cross-borough commissioning of refuges was highly desirable" but that there is a "lack of data which could be utilised in order to take the first steps down

this road”. The research reported here provides both data and analysis, and highlights that such a regional approach could enable women to be more able to travel wherever they need to. However, currently, across England, what is essentially regional or national provision is being left at the mercy of local decision-making. Local approaches to planning and funding services, such as is increasingly possible under the Localism Act (DCLG, 2011) and Section 9 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act (HM Government, 2011), are far too local to meet the needs of the tens of thousands of women and children relocating to escape domestic violence each year.

End note

<sup>1</sup>Direct quotations are referenced by the pseudonym and demographic categories chosen by the interviewee.

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