



***AND STILL, LIKE DUST, WE RISE:
LONDON SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE***

INTRODUCTION

This report documents the views and experiences of women in London who have experienced some form of domestic or sexual violence. The material is drawn from a number of different focus groups carried out on behalf of government departments, LB Hounslow and the Victims' Champion. All of the material presented here is drawn only from focus groups held in London which were:

- 1 x Refugee and asylum seeking women
- 1 x Women trafficked into the UK
- 1 x Traveller women
- 1 x Women subjected to forced marriage / 'honour' based violence
- 1 x Women survivors of domestic violence
- 2 x Women in prostitution / homeless women
- 2 x Women survivors of rape and sexual violence
- 2 x Women survivors of Female Genital Mutilation

Participants were a representative sample drawn from across all diversity strands with the exception of gender identity. Overall, BAMER women were slightly over-represented.

Most of the women with whom we consulted experienced multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage based on their identity and life experience which in turn made them to vulnerable to higher rates of violence and abuse in their lives. However, these women and girls are not 'hard to reach' (a label usually attributed to groups who do not use services); they are women who agencies and government departments often find hard to hear: a distinction which exposes the power dynamics of naming. These women are often excluded from consultations and are either denied access to mainstream provision or make a logical and rational choice not to use services because they either do not meet their needs or because it would place them at greater risk of violence and abuse.

'Services make assumptions about what is needed; they don't actually ask women what they need. Then if it doesn't work the women are blamed for being difficult or anti social.'

'I don't feel safe anywhere in my life. I've experienced violence from partners; I've been raped and I didn't report it; I've worked on the streets, I was vulnerable and on drugs. I don't have any faith in the system. I feel like I constantly have to prove myself, although I've turned my life around now the police and other services just look at what I was in the past, they don't see what is happening now and deal with that situation, they just judge me on what I was.'

As is common throughout the domestic and sexual violence sector, many service providers are also survivors which is reflected in some of the quotes.

Experiences of the Police

As a consequence of violence and abuse, women from all groups had used the criminal justice system (CJS). For some of them, this was a positive experience:

'I used the police recently it's the first time I've used services in England, I was rather pleased with the response, in January when I got my eye damaged, I went to the hospital and the police were advising me about what to do and where to go, victim support and the help available, they were alright. They told me not to drop the charges and to be aware of people, places and things. I don't have much experience of services here; when I did what I did [worked in prostitution] I did it from home so I never really had to contend with the cops. I never used services when I was abroad.'

'When I was getting beaten, I was scared to phone the police, I was scared they would get social services involved, but it got to the point where it was too much, he was stabbing me, so I had to phone the police and actually when I did phone they were really helpful. He got put in jail and whilst he was in prison they kind of moved me, so he didn't know where he was or anything. But this was the only time I found them helpful, I think it was because he had used a weapon, they took it seriously. All the other times they had come and said, well if he comes back call us, or taken three hours to come. I had to lock him in the house, lock all the windows, and then phone the police and tell them he stabbed me. If you haven't got marks on you, I had to let him beat the crap out of me just so I could get help, and get away from him. He got 6 months; he did three months of his sentence.'

'I would report again, I wouldn't hesitate, no man is ever going to lay his hands on me again. Mine was a long time ago. My daughter said to me the other day, now I know what you went through, she can't live with him anymore; she is in a hostel now. He's a hog. I got four beautiful children though.'

'It's good that police won't leave the case if you drop the charges, they do it anyway; that's really good. They make you pursue it.'

'He was sending me letters, threatening me from prison, I thought I should drop the charges, but the police just took it over which was a good thing. I didn't give evidence; I told the police I couldn't see him, if I see him I'll get weak.'

'The police listened to what I had to say, he (perpetrator) would always come to me for money for drugs and if I didn't have any he would hit me. I'm not with him no more. I feel safer now.'

'I feel safer now, I went to court, and it was horrible for me, I didn't understand what was going on, nobody explained these things to me.'

'I called the Police after a long time, I wasn't strong, the community didn't help me, then that day I felt strong and confident so I called them. They were helpful, they came and said 'go there and there', I should have done it before but I wasn't ready, I had no confidence. As soon as I called, he just walked out. But I changed the lock.'

For some women, their experiences were not so positive:

'My uncle stabbed his wife and the police didn't take it seriously. You have to be here when you call them; don't take it as a joke.'

'Sometimes the police take an hour to come, the police need to be there in minutes. They need to learn a lot.'

'By rights they should be taught the job before they start, when they're training, instead of getting trained on the job.'

'Normally when you phone the police your partner runs off, so getting the police looking for them would be good. The police should make sure you're protected, otherwise you phone the police and your partner comes back and beats the shit out of you twice as hard.'

'Me and my boyfriend were having an argument outside the police station, it took them 45 minutes to come!'

'He kidnapped my son once and it took four months for the courts to find him and get him back. The police wouldn't go in and get my son that way, I had to go to my solicitor and it took four months of fighting.'

'After my cousin called the police, after her husband was violent and harassing her, two women officers came out and they said 'it happens in all communities, my ex boyfriend was violent to me, you've just got to deal with these things'. The police called a few days later to tell us they'd called him in and cautioned him and been told to stay away. We still had the pressure from this guy's aunts, uncles, telling us to tell her to get back with him.'

'It's common to hear from the police that it's a domestic matter, we won't get involved. They are not always very helpful.'

'The police came out but they didn't do anything about it, they were not helpful.'

'There is a real problem of communication; the criminal justice system needs to learn how to communicate effectively and sensitively with the victim. Often, the police come across as very flippant when it comes to domestic abuse, saying 'why bother, she'll just go back to her partner'.'

'A friend of mine tried to report rape within a marriage, and they told her it would be very difficult to prosecute, so why did she bother?'

'My friend was raped by her boyfriend, she called the police and the first thing they said was, 'are you sure it was rape? Are you sure you didn't consent to it? You know how you women are,' this is the first contact she had with the criminal justice system; no wonder nobody has any faith. I know so many people who would rather talk to me than call the police. And I wouldn't go to the police – I'd rather just cope with it myself.'

'The police should focus on how to respond sensitively at the crime scene and not on providing ongoing support, that's not their role. It's crucial that they act appropriately at this point as this is often women's first encounter with the criminal justice system and if she has a bad experience it might put her off engaging with the system again. Alongside a good police response, specialist independent support for victims immediately after the point of reporting should be offered to all women.'

And some women specifically avoided involving the Police:

'My ex-husband abused me for 3 years, I never went to the police because I was scared, he would tell them something better than I could. Sometimes he would beat me up so I couldn't move my legs or arms. I didn't call the police because he would just come back and maybe kill me, so I just let him.'

'I don't think the police would do anything'

'I spoke with one of my brothers, and he helped me with my ex, he helped me leave. I didn't call the police.'

'The cops bust us even when we're not doing anything, even if we're hanging around waiting for a friend, just because they know our history. A punter attacked me recently but I wouldn't report to the police because of the way they treat us. He tried to strangle me half way through and I know he's doing it to other girls round here; I burnt him with my lighter and ran away, so he's got a burn on his hand.'

Concerns about increasing risk following reporting violence

Some victims reported involvement of police as increasing their safety. For example:

'He tried to bring community members around after three weeks, they came around 3am in the morning, I said 'go away I don't want to speak to you, my kids are sleeping'. They tried to come in, and I threatened to call the police so they left. That was the last time; I've got left alone after that'.

However, women also said that when they did report violence to the police, this had not resulted in an increase in their safety, but often led to further abuse.

'If women report violence he just gets released and then he punishes her, there is no punishment for him. He won't get locked up and the beatings will only be worse ...there is a deep distrust between the Traveller community and the police.'

As one woman told us,

'The focus of services should be what they can offer to increase women's and girls' safety, not to judge women's behaviour and what she is doing or not doing in response to experiencing violence.'

Women victims treated as offenders

In some cases, women who were victims of domestic violence who had called the police found themselves cautioned or arrested as a result, which led to a loss of confidence to call the police again combined, in some cases, with experiencing further abuse from their current or former partners as a result. Instead women

wanted to police to more effectively identify who the primary perpetrator is, especially when domestic violence is reported.

'Although he was abusing me for years, the police had proof that I had assaulted him in self-defence, because I admitted it when they turned up, so it was almost like I was being blackmailed into going to court. They just want a result, and they don't care which one they get it from.'

Some women told us that their abusers are increasingly aware that they can 'play the system' to continue the abuse of women. Where women have a record of offending behaviour in response to the violence they have experienced, police tend to treat women solely as offenders and not as victims of systematic violence, especially when they experience psychological violence.

'I haven't been beaten up and that's the bad thing. I came here in 2001 and married a British citizen, he provided me with everything. But he was from a different background and a different religion, he indoctrinated my children, he wouldn't let me see anyone. I was so frustrated and so helpless, there was an incident, I punctured the tyre so he didn't take the children away...from all contact with the police they held that against me... The problem is on the system I have a history because of this one incident at the beginning with the tyres, I'm going through the criminal justice system now as a perpetrator. He's also given me a long history by making up false allegations. Only the IDVA believes me. He has cut himself and said I've cut him, and because police look and see the previous incident involving the knife they think I've got a tendency to use weapons. They've now charged me and I'm due in court.'

Women in the sex industry and women offenders, in particular, felt that when they reported violence to the police, they failed to get a timely and effective response, which they attributed to the police knowing their circumstances and making a judgement about their need for protection. They recommended that specialist trained officers should be available for sex workers to report violence against them.

Anti-Social Behaviour Orders

Particular groups of women (e.g. sex workers, homeless women) also spoke about how statutory services used Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) against them, which exacerbated the dangers they faced. Women said they wanted local authorities to provide support and safety for women sex workers instead of taking out ASBOs to remove them from the area, because this denies them access to health and support services, which further endangers them.

'My ASBO is taking everything away from me, I'm homeless, I don't have a doctor, no support services, nothing ... They don't want to deal with it they just want rid of us... its all about enforcement and not helping women out of their situation...they are only concerned about voting figures.'

'I lost my tenancy because the domestic violence that was happening was seen as 'anti social behaviour'.'

Evidence collection

Some women told us that ineffective evidence collection by police impacted on the case, for example one woman was disappointed that the police did not interview her children as witnesses to the incidents so the case did not proceed to court and in another case, police failed to use a professional trained interpreter to take a witness

statement, which almost jeopardised the court hearing. Criminal justice agencies need to be fully accessible for women without English as a first language, through the provision of specially trained interpreters.

'They said it was lack of evidence. Both my sons were witnesses to what was happening, but they didn't ask them. My son was there once when he attacked me, but they didn't ask them.'

Women across all focus groups spoke of police failure to respond to incidents because of an apparent lack of 'proof', particularly where emotional violence, threats, harassment and stalking had occurred. Often this involved women being told 'we can't do anything until something happens' which women saw as dismissive and invalidating of their experience of being harassed and stalked. Very few women across all focus groups had been told about the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, yet all thought that would have made a difference in their case had this Act been used against their abuser.

'The police want us to provide proof, it is very hard to prove that violence has occurred unless you've got visible injuries; but they always want proof and witnesses.'

Women felt strongly that the police should know whether there was a history of violence when they were called to an incident, and also felt there should be a register of injunctions so that police around the country knew if an active injunction was in place against perpetrators, even if they moved between police force areas. Women preferred the idea of a centralised intelligence system, a register for professionals in the justice system to use.

'Women come to us [Poppy Project] describing the same people and it's us who have gone to the police and said these incidences are linked, women are reporting intelligence to different police forces but they're not linked up, information is being missed. We need a centralised intelligence system to gather information on traffickers who are repeat offenders.'

Keeping women informed

In 2005, the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (VCOP) was introduced which sets out the services victims can expect to receive from the criminal justice system. This includes:

- A right to information about their crime within specified time scales, including the right to be notified of any arrests and court cases.
- A dedicated family liaison police officer to be assigned to bereaved relatives.
- Clear information from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) on eligibility for compensation under the Scheme.
- All victims to be told about Victim Support and either referred on to them or offered their service.
- An enhanced service in the cases of vulnerable or intimidated victims.

Many women said they had not been kept informed about any developments as the case progressed through to court, which in turn they felt had compromised their safety. In some instances, the VCOP was clearly not being implemented but in other cases, there was once again a mismatch between what victims wanted and what CJS agencies are providing. For example, women who had been supported by an IDVA spoke warmly of the pro-active contact aspect of their support, which made them feel cared about and safer. In another example, a victim spoke about being

informed about the abuser being let out on bail several hours after he had already been round her home to harass her. In both the examples given, the VCOP was being applied but none of the victims felt they were being kept informed by the CJS.

'The criminal justice system is really intimidating, women might want to report, but we might also need time to deal with what has happened before they prosecute. We need to know what to expect, and to know that it won't be taken any further if women don't want it to. We need somewhere to go and talk it over with a service independent of the police, and a leaflet telling women what will happen if we report, almost like a flow chart, to inform our decision, so that we know what we're getting into, this would be really helpful.'

Of those women who had gone to court it was notable that few were able to distinguish with which professionals they had been in contact. Women were generally unclear about the differences between the CPS, court staff, the Witness Care Unit and Victim Support and rarely knew who to contact if they needed information or advice. Whilst this may not be a fault of the individual services concerned, it does highlight how confusing it can be to have myriad services involved in ones case, particularly at points of high stress such as at court itself. Greater care needs to be taken with regard to introductions and the provision of written information that can be consulted at a later point should questions arise.

'Nothing happened for me to increase my safety when I was waiting to go to court, they just tell you to get to court and that's it.'

Where women had experience of the courts, they often criticised the way their case was handled and the time taken to get to court.

'Nobody got in touch with me at all when I was waiting to go to court. On the day (of court) I met witness support but with this domestic violence thing, the victims, they're getting younger and younger. And most of the volunteers they're all retired, the age gap, it's hard to relate, I mean I know they're there to look after you but we can't always speak to each other as we'd like.'

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)

Some women we consulted with knew their cases had been discussed at a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC). Some noted that safety planning had been useful for them.

'I've had two MARACs, I was high risk. I had safety planning as well, like when they tell you to have code words with friends, if you're in danger. It sounds silly but it really does work, some of those strategies.'

However, most did not feel they understood why a MARAC would benefit them or that this had increased their safety in any way. Ways are needed to ensure that victim's consent is sought for the sharing of personal information and that the purpose of MARACs is better explained.

'Nothing was in place to increase my safety even though my case has been to a MARAC. I couldn't even stop him coming to the house, because he owns it. I rang the police, and said he needs to leave, I'm in danger, and they said there was nothing I can do, so I had to leave and take the kids with me.'

'I don't know, what do they discuss at a MARAC? Do they just all sit around and talk about you? I think a restraining order is going to be applied for, and Sanctuary are coming round, but no-one's contacted me yet.'

'All I'm getting out of a MARAC is Sanctuary coming round. But when they did come round the other day, it all seems to be about my son, it's more about that. I'm a bit confused really, I thought they were supposed to be helping and advising me. I've got loads of people contacting me, but nobody's actually helping!'

Sexual Assault Referral Services (SARCs)

Some women we consulted with had used Sexual Assault Referral Centres and women spoke positively about the service they had received from the Havens.

'The second time round when I was raped again I went to the Haven, they were fantastic, they made me tea, took my statement, gave me clean clothes, let me have a shower. I think Haven is the best thing. I was taken to Whitechapel, the doctor that examined me was perfect, brilliant, she was female, she was fantastic.'

'The Haven gave my daughter her dignity back. She was so demoralised. We were there from 6pm in the evening to 3.30am the next morning; by the time we got home I felt she had got a little bit of herself back. To have someone to say 'I'm so glad I met you, I wish it had been in different circumstances, I believe you.' She didn't get anything like that from the police, but the staff at the (Whitechapel) Haven in London were brilliant. I couldn't fault them.'

Access to pre-trial counselling

Some women who had been sexually abused spoke of their confusion about whether they could access support whilst waiting for the court case, and felt that for all agencies, safety must be the over-riding priority for intervention.

'It took two years to get to court from the time I reported the sexual abuse I had experienced. The CID officer told me if I went for counselling during this time it would interfere with my case. That was the time I really needed it, confronting these things on my own was really hard. I now know this isn't true but I was clearly given misinformation and told that if I got support it would jeopardise the case. You believe people in authority, the police; you don't think to question them.'

'Services need to support women in response to where a woman's at in her life, they need to give women choices and recognise what women already have done to cope with the violence and to keep themselves safe. Women's safety must be the overriding priority for services.'

'I had to go to a refuge, 4 kids in tow, they have had to wait months to go to school. The manager of the refuge said that they had counselling in place for me and the kids but it would have to wait until the case went to court, because otherwise they will use it against me in court. So we were left suffering for 5-6 months until the case went to court. It really needs to change.'

'I was offered counselling but I couldn't take it because of the court case, his barrister would use it against me, so where am I supposed to get support from while waiting to get to court?'

Women who had experienced domestic and sexual violence, and who had gone to court, spoke of how fearful they were of the process.

'There is a lot of fear about making a statement and going to court. If there was some way of telling women who have been attacked that making a statement doesn't have to be traumatic, there can be a female officer, it's in your own time. More information should be available ...it's having that knowledge and knowing about what steps will be taken.'

Even though some women had been to court and got a conviction, for them this was not the end of their trauma and for several women a conviction was almost irrelevant to their healing process.

'I thought if I went to court that would kind of finish it you know? But it didn't. I still have nightmares and I don't trust men at all any more.'

'I was terrorised by my husband who also abused my children. I would like to ask the person who decides why they get their sentence halved for 'good behaviour' when I'm serving a life sentence for what he did to me and my children. I would like to sit in front of them and ask 'why?' I was raped and beaten for years, I don't get time off for good behaviour. I have lost my job, my house, my car. Yes, I'm still alive, but that is only because of [rape crisis], who have helped me when I have hit rock bottom.'

Support throughout the CJS process

Women indicated a need for support before, at and after any court hearings.

Most women felt that the police should prioritise focussing on providing a supportive response to the crime report, whilst referring to specialist services for ongoing support and independent advocacy throughout all the stages. As outlined above, most women indicated a need for independent specialist services for women, with the choice of all services offering women staff. At court, women indicated the key support from domestic and sexual violence advocates, such as IDVAs and ISVAs and from the Witness Service.

'The support I've had from my IDVA and from Witness Services has been great.'

Consideration of continuing support from specialist services after court was also clearly indicated.

Discontinuing a case

With any form of violence against women, being believed is crucial, yet many spoke about the decision to discontinue the case by the CPS or by the judge as being interpreted as disbelief in the victim. Women and service managers described the often devastating impact that discontinuation of the case had had on them.

'My case was dropped due to lack of evidence. I did get a letter but no-one really explained why or told me about where I could get any help. The case may be over but I'm still dealing with the consequences.'

'After my ex raped my daughter - she was only twelve - I thought life can't get any worse than this. I was wrong. It took me ages to get counselling for her and Social Services treated me with suspicion as if I let it happen. Then I got a letter saying the case had been dropped due to lack of evidence. My daughter used to be full of life - always smiling, always happy and out-going. Now she's either completely withdrawn or very clingy and she cries all the time. What about that evidence? There doesn't seem to be anyone on our

side. Even the letter I got didn't seem to care. They couldn't even be bothered to look up my name. It was addressed to 'Parent'

Safety at court and use of special measures:

Women who had been to court said that they wanted more consistent responses by the court services, so that women don't have to rely on living in a certain area to access safety mechanisms in the court building, specialist courts or a sympathetic judge.

'I didn't like all the waiting at court. I was scared enough as it was and having to wait almost all day just made it worse.'

In particular, women said that being able to visit the court in advance of the hearing was helpful and made them feel safer to attend the hearing, and women had also welcomed special measures taken in court, where these had been available, which they said went some way towards feeling safer whilst they were in attendance.

'I felt safe in the court, but it's a labyrinth! I went in the back way so I didn't have to see him.'

'My son and I went to look round the court before the day of the trial, with the witness service, that was really helpful, it made me feel safer when I got there and knew what to expect.'

'I had screens up in the court which made me feel safer, but I was still shaking.'

'I was sat in this room with the witness person. The security was really, really good at the court, they even went to the toilet with me, they were brilliant, they kept checking up on me. They escorted us when we went for lunch.'

'I went to court in February, and it was horrible, his defence was bombarding me with questions. I had three panic attacks, I had a screen up but it was still really daunting. You just have to remember you're telling the truth, and be consistent. The CPS man got up and made him look a prat though, which was good.'

Some women noted that whilst they felt safe in the court building, their journey to and from the court was not addressed in terms of safety planning, and they wanted to see safety mechanisms introduced for women to travel to and from court where necessary.

'I've been in court all week, there's all this focus on safety at court and then they're letting him out after court, and we get on the same train to go home. And he's just there staring at me. I've done the court thing three times now, he got five months, then a year and he did six months. If he sees me now he'll beat the shit out of me because I've gone to court, 'you're a snitch, you're a grass', I don't stand a chance, he's 6ft, he's a gangster from XXXX, I've got no chance. So no, I didn't feel safe at court. Because he got on my train, in the same carriage. They told me it was a coincidence but he was told to stay away. He had the opportunity to get onto another carriage but he didn't, he's standing there staring at me... And that's what they always tell you, I'll get you in the end, and you get out of court and there they are, it's like sleeping with the enemy in real life, it's horrible.'

Women had little to say about their experience of prosecutors in terms of safety, and had little sense of the CPS being on 'their side'. Most were unaware of CPS policies or procedures and what could be expected of prosecutors. Ensuring victims are made aware of what they can expect would be beneficial.

'I felt very alone when I was in the witness box. The prosecutor barely looked at me and just kept shuffling papers. He didn't seem very well prepared. My ex was having constant whispered conversations with his solicitor all afternoon.'

'The prosecutor did introduce herself but in a very off-hand way. There was no warmth, no reassurance. I felt like just another case.'

Sentencing

Although there are sentencing guidelines set nationally and the defendant's mitigation often affects the sentence that is imposed, many women thought there needed to be stronger and more consistent sentencing for crimes of violence against women and girls, and for magistrates to have training on violence against women and equality issues. Many women still felt, for example, that in cases of rape and sexual violence, in particular, sentences were too lenient.

'I was always one of those women that says you should prosecute - what if he does it to someone else? Then you'd be partly responsible. At the end of it he only got convicted for the assault not for raping me and he only got community service because of his previous good character. That made me feel sick. I'd never encourage anyone to go through that and I wouldn't do it again either.'

Women wanted conditions placed on perpetrators long after the court case (for example through restraining orders) because women told us they continued to feel unsafe between the court hearing and sentencing, and after the court hearing, especially if the offender received a community sentence. Women wanted orders to also take into account offenders harassing family members, where necessary.

'I've had it all, he's poured coffee on me, when my son was three months old, he told me to put the baby down, just so he can beat the shit out of me, I said no, and he poured boiling water on my shoulder. It's all forms of control, shampoo on my head, wash your hair, he used to say. With the court last week I got it out of my system, I feel like it's closure and I can move on [but] if they let him out now I feel sorry for me. They have been letting him go, on a tag, but they remanded him over the weekend, it does still worry me, there is no danger now but the jury will find him guilty or not guilty. They are going to bail him, weeks and weeks go on before he gets sentenced, he'll be frustrated he's going to want to get me.'

'For men who abuse, it would be good if you could keep the bail conditions for a longer period, maybe a year of something, regardless of the sentence, because we are still a victim for a long time. It takes two years to get your life back on track again. I've got to apply for a non-molestation order through the civil courts now, because the conditions end after the court case.'

'I think they should have tags on them after going to court so you know where they are 24/7.'

'For me, I think after going to court they should keep the conditions of bail for a minimum six months, or a year. There is still a risk. But he's afraid of the police so having bail conditions would make all the difference.'

Some women also spoke of the trauma of hearing that the perpetrator has decided to appeal the decision, and of the need of ongoing support throughout the appeal process, which women felt was often overlooked.

'Even though he's got a restraining order on him since the case went to court, I still feel scared when I'm out, I have lot of flashbacks. He is now appealing the sentence. I don't know the date; the police are going to call me. They phoned me to tell me he was appealing... He hasn't been in touch with me since going to court, but he has been contacting my family, even though he has a restraining order on him. They have kept me in a safe place since being in court; I'm in a safe house.'

Benefits of going to court

Some women spoke of the benefits of going through the court process. Some women told us that they found the experience of giving evidence in court to be cathartic, one that provides them with a sense of closure. In particular, some spoke of the strength they obtained from being supported by women's services, in order to support the case going to court.

'I'm glad I went to court. It wasn't pleasant and I think he should have got a longer sentence but at least for now he can't get to me.'

'Last September it was, I was at my friends house, he slapped me round the face, punched me in the face. They've charged him with something, I think its GBH it's worse than common assault. But the trial has taken two weeks because they're bringing up everything, everything that has happened over the last six years. Every time I've been to court, the photos, the black eyes, they've got a nightie of mine from 2007, where he poured coffee over me and I gave it to the police officer, the amount of phones that he's smashed. It's closure... The prosecutor was brilliant because I'm telling the truth. The cross-examiner, in my eyes, didn't have a leg to stand on. What could he possibly throw at me?'

Satisfaction with the prosecution process

In terms of satisfaction with the process, meeting the prosecutor before the court hearing was important for women, but they suggested this should be for a longer period of time. Women also valued the support they received from other trained staff in specialist domestic violence courts, like court ushers.

'I've got to say the CPS man in my case was very good. I got interrogated by the defence for an hour and 35 minutes, and the CPS man was good, he said, just one more question. He was really nice, but I think one or two meetings before the court date would be good, to feel comfortable, especially if you're wary of new places or people like I am.'

'If I could change one thing it would be meeting with the prosecutors before the trial.'

'The usher in my case, she was lovely, really, really reassuring. When I had a panic attack and had to come out, she was saying you're doing really well, more than you know, and that was really nice to have that reassurance.'

Many women have expectations that the criminal justice system will be on their side as a victim of violence, and are not clear that the role of the prosecutor is to prosecute on behalf of the state, which presents a continual mismatch between expectation and reality. Some women felt the criminal justice system was inherently biased against supporting the victim, and wanted to see separate legal representation for victims. Women also spoke about the need for the CJS to encourage women to report and to inform abusers that their behaviour would not be tolerated.

'There should be advertising in public places. Men must know that women are protected by the law, whether a woman has papers or not. We need more community awareness, neighbourhood watch, information in churches, mosques, bus stops, fliers in different places, places where women go.'

'These are the things we suffer in silence. Our lives are spent in constant fear of stop and search, of being put in detention, which is a sort of torture in itself.'

Satisfaction with professionals' responses

One focus group indicated that they would all call the police if it happened again and would all go to court. The same group indicated that all prosecutors introduced themselves and most of them made victim personal statements.

'I felt safe in the court, but it's a labyrinth! I went in the back way so I didn't have to see him.'

'My son and I went to look round the court before the day of the trial, with the witness service, that was really helpful, it made me feel safer when I got there and knew what to expect.'

However some of the other focus groups, especially with more vulnerable victims such as sex workers, asylum seekers, drug users and street homeless women had different experiences. These women were particularly dissatisfied with statutory services and the justice system judging them on their previous behaviour or on their lifestyle, and wanted a safe, supportive response and equal access to justice irrespective of their background or circumstances and experience of violence and abuse.

'The police, judges, probation, they look down on you, we all make mistakes but they judge you. We're all human beings we make mistakes. It's like we have no rights. You're standing there and you're bleeding, but you dress a certain way or you're in with a certain crowd and they instantly judge you. In other words you're discarded which is wrong.'

Many women identified with this experience of the Police:

'It's common to hear from the police that it's a domestic matter, we won't get involved. They are not always very helpful.'

'She went [to the Police] and they said 'we can't do anything, it's a family matter'. They didn't contact her or get back in touch, she contacted the police'

several times after to see if they had done anything, they said 'no it's a family matter'.

Some women had made efforts to collect evidence themselves and were bewildered that it could not be used. Whilst there are good evidential reasons for this, it was disappointing that this information had not been explained to the victim leaving them feeling disbelieved.

'I called the police, he left marks on me from the first assault, and my mum took pictures, but the magistrate won't look at them because there is no date or time.'

Women who were not kept informed that the case had been discontinued before getting to court told us that the dual impact of the lack of timely information and of the case being dropped was devastating.

'I didn't get as far as court. He kept being released on bail, and then they said they didn't have enough evidence and it took too long. I went for a meeting with the CPS, and I asked if he's been let off, and they said yeah, and I said well nobody told me. It was in January, and I didn't find out until March. He [the abuser] actually told me.'

'I would have loved to go to court to give evidence. The first time I was really nervous for my son, but this time, I was going to do it. Because the case was dropped, I feel like I've been kicked in the face. And I know he's going to do something again, I feel like he's got away with it.'

Satisfaction with CJS of the FGM Focus Group

Women who had experienced female genital mutilation (FGM) told us what they thought about involving the police when experiencing domestic violence. In general, the view was positive but when the question of rape or sexual violence within a marriage was raised, most women felt they would be less likely to contact the police and would seek help within the community or tell no-one.

'Girls are affected by FGM and then by forced marriage as young as 14 years old. They need support there and then. There was a girl I knew who reported to her school about a forced marriage. Her school called the police who mediated with the family. They encouraged her to go home and they killed her. The police didn't believe the severity of what was happening to her.'

'Traditional families don't approve of women calling the police, it's shame on your family, it's not really acceptable. People will tell their relatives first, and then go the Imam for support.'

'It depends on the situation, if I [young woman] was getting hurt, in an emergency I would call the police, but otherwise I would talk to my family, if it wasn't an emergency.'

'It's better for women to seek support from within the community, but if it gets physical they should report to the police.'

'Rape within marriage doesn't happen much in the Somali community, you don't hear about it, if a woman is suffering like this she doesn't tell anyone.'

'In some cases if a woman has been abused and she is really really upset, they will tell the man to leave the house, until the woman has calmed down. They will tell him to leave her alone and settle things later.'

The Somali women we consulted with felt that FGM being a crime was symbolic, and could be used by communities to educate others about it being no longer acceptable. Some women expressed frustration that the practice was still so prevalent. There was a consensus that education to prevent FGM was a priority, and women felt that education should be supported by the state but led and delivered by communities themselves. Some Somali women went further, framing FGM as violence against women and girls and a violation of human rights.

'Prosecution is not the way to deal with FGM, if the police unexpectedly knock at your door the neighbours would talk; it wouldn't help. Education is the key, not prosecution. It's better to ask how are we going to educate the people.'

'People have more understanding that it is wrong and it is abuse but it is hard because it is tied up with our culture. Our religion does not allow it [FGM]. Government needs to control it. The best way is to educate the parents. It is a tradition, men wanted women to be like that, but it is changing, people are slowly changing, although some men still want women to be circumcised.'

'It has been controversial because there is a small minority that don't feel comfortable with the law; they feel the girls should be circumcised. But most people feel it is good to have something to follow, we live in this country, we have to follow the law.'

'In my time it was normal, everyone was glad to be circumcised, men wouldn't go with a woman who wasn't circumcised, when I had my daughters they had to cut open my vagina. I have four daughters, when I told them this they were shocked, they said we are lucky we are here. We follow the law here.'

'What I want to know is that the law says you will be imprisoned for 14 years if you carry out FGM. But there are still people going out [of the UK] for FGM, what I want to know is how can we or how are we going to stop these people?'

'There was a celebration when we were circumcised, it was made out as a good thing to us, we were bought gold, had a party. We didn't understand what was happening; now we know it was wrong and slowly this will change. People have to talk to us, the people in the UK need to understand the whole story of FGM.'

'The government should support the community groups within the Somalian community and then they can take the lead in re-educating people that FGM is wrong. Because when someone is working with the community about FGM they need to be from the practising community and able to understand the whole story.'

'We need to talk to our men about FGM, the reason it's being done is for them. Men should be educated about FGM so they no longer want women to be like that. I used to live in Europe and over there they [men] respected us, they were aware of FGM and they asked us what they could do to help stop it. I'm shocked at what it is like in the UK.'

'Preventing FGM is about education and publicity; it is about women saying I will not circumcise my children and men saying they don't care if women are circumcised.'

'Educating communities about FGM should be widespread, it should include stuff about the health complications, about how it's not part of our religion, about how it's against the law; education should be about every aspect of FGM.'

'Women that have had FGM need special help and someone that knows what they are doing. But sometimes nurses and doctors insult us, telling us to go back to whoever did that to us.'

'When they see women that has had FGM, and because we the Somali community are such a small community, when doctors see a girl or women that has had FGM, they call everyone to come have a look at our genitalia, it's very shameful.'

Community attitudes to FGM

There were differences of opinion amongst the women we consulted who had experienced FGM. Some women held the view that FGM was an acceptable practice and called for safer FGM practices and better healthcare responses, which do not damage women.

'I am a member of the old mothers, and all girls are to be cut. They are to be cut so the man does not reject her, so she has to be closed. We do FGM so that she is pretty and gets married. If a man finds she has the 'goods' [clitoris] the man will divorce her. She will be shamed; married yesterday and divorced today. I heard that a man found out his wife was not cut and he divorced her there and then.'

'So the woman is not disliked by men; her 'goods' are taken care of very well by us. When the man looks and sees there is nothing there he is happy and knows that she is a clean woman. Then we call the Doctor and open her for the wedding night.'

Women who had experienced FGM wanted health professionals to be required to have training so they can respond sensitively and appropriately to women who have undergone FGM. Women also wanted to be able to access community support workers and interpreters where necessary, within maternity services and after giving birth.

'When I had my first child 6 months ago, they didn't help, they said to me 'you people, you'll be back here next year anyway, I don't know why you are complaining.' I had to fight for the midwife to check me, they refused to give me any painkillers, it was really traumatic.'

'Midwives should make an effort to talk to us nicely; I am already in so much pain. I received no aftercare after the birth of my children, now I can't even sit down properly.'

'In hospitals, when you are in labour, the midwife doesn't try to communicate with you because of the language barrier; they just assume they know what is best for you. Especially when a woman is circumcised, they need more attention. They should have more training because many health professionals don't know how to deal with this.'

'I was circumcised and she was giving me all the wrong advice, telling me not to push. If the government wants to help us then we need somebody in the labour ward who understands and can help us.'

'On the maternity wards and in the labour room there should be a Somali worker. Not an interpreter that has to be called and takes hours but one that is employed and is there to support the women that come in who have had FGM. If there was someone there all the time it would stop the midwives being abusive to us.'

Women who had experienced FGM also spoke of the role health services should have of identifying young women at risk of FGM and educating parents about the dangers involved, although there was disagreement over the suggestion that girls at risk of FGM should be subjected to vaginal examinations.

'If children are going back home they will need to be immunized, that would be an opportunity when the GP could say something, and explain the consequences of FGM. Education of the parents so they are aware of the consequences of FGM is really important.'

'Any woman who is pregnant and who has undergone FGM should be educated about the laws against FGM; the community midwife could talk to her about it, just like they are educated about healthy eating. A more gentle approach should be used initially but if she refuses to listen and says that it is her culture then the police should intervene.'

'You can educate, but people are still doing it, I want to know how we can find out about it without waiting until that young girl becomes a woman and is having issues with her pregnancy. You would let your child be examined if you thought she had cancer. What is the difference with being examined to see if she has been mutilated?'

'I couldn't accept my child being examined, she is innocent in all of this, why should I put her through that? I don't want girls examined, and no mother would want that.'

'When the family come back from being abroad, the mother should be asked about FGM, you can tell from the body language, so it's not always necessary to examine the child.'

Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee Women

BME women who spoke to us also expressed concerns about knife crime and feared for their own safety and the safety of their children when out during the day or night:

'Over here [in the UK], people just pass you by if you are a victim of violence, you don't know when you go out in the morning if you will come home safe at night. But now the most important thing is knives being used. You can be in the street and no-one will help you if you are getting attacked.'

'Safety on the streets here is terrible. Teenagers are stabbing each other, violating each other. There is no focus on prevention; it is all on protection, after something has already happened. You get worried if you hear sirens, you think it might be your son or daughter.'

'We need to educate society and government agencies need to reassure us that they can keep us safe. I saw a group of young people beating up a child. I tried to protect the child, but the police didn't care, they just walked off. If the police won't defend us who will? I felt totally let down.'

'A burglar came into my home and beat me, I ran after him down the road and nobody offered to help me. People are scared to help you, the government should advertise that if you help someone it's ok, you won't get into trouble and it's a good idea to support each other.'

BME women also wanted to challenge the normative frame of domestic violence as male perpetrator/female victim.

'It's not just the classic image of a male perpetrator we need to worry about. It's the mother in law; it's the uncle from down the street. We need to educate our communities so they are aware that what they are doing is wrong and it won't be tolerated, violence against women is an offence and you will be punished.'

Some BME women we spoke to had also not had positive responses from the police. Some felt that the police should only be called as a last resort if they experienced domestic violence, and that the community should deal with domestic violence themselves, which indicated that greater awareness is needed in communities of the nature of domestic violence and its associated risks, and also of the dangers of community mediation for women living with domestic violence.

'I am Somali and domestic violence happens, but when you call the police they are heavy-handed. If there is violence in the home, the police come and remove the man. In our culture you would try mediation, to try and resolve the situation and avoid family breakdown. Why has the council not considered creating a community support network for women that are affected by domestic violence and that can address the issue within the community setting, and if the police have to be involved then they should be called by the community group.'

However, the majority of BME women disagreed. They said they women wanted the police to respond more effectively to BME women's experience of violence and abuse, to forced marriage and to violence perpetrated by extended family members; and recognised that community mediation between girls, women and family members should be challenged, not condoned.

'If there is domestic violence, if a woman is injured, then the police should be called and a community group will not help. If a man beats his wife, trying to mediate between them will only allow him to continue. You should let the police take care of it.'

Trafficked women

Most of the trafficked women we spoke to had had relatively little contact with a range of external agencies, except for the police, immigration services, and specialist women's support services like the Poppy Project. They spoke of how hard it had been for them to escape and how few opportunities they had to seek help.

'I don't think you can do anything, I went straight from the airport to a house to be treated like a slave; you are behind closed doors, no access to services.'

When I did go out my aunt told me if I reported her to the police she would send me straight back to Nigeria, where I had already been treated very badly, so I was afraid of escaping to get help, and afraid of being forced to go back.'

'Lots of trafficked women stay inside, they don't go into public places. They don't feel protected by the police; in the past they have been disbelieved so they just don't go out, they are scared of getting help.'

Women therefore stressed the importance of the police and other agencies providing an effective and supportive response at the first point of women seeking help. Yet most women said they did not feel protected by the police, when they managed to approach them for help. Although there were isolated examples of good practice, it was evident that practice was inconsistent between police forces.

One woman spoke of the significantly different response she experienced by two neighbouring police forces.

'When I first went to the police they were so good to me, they supported me and put me in a hotel for two days and kept me safe, and then they took me to the police over here (in London) but they shouted at me, and locked me in a cell with no food or water. I was crying. They just said they were going to take me back to my country. It was only the lawyer from Poppy, thank god for Poppy, who helped me through. The police need training on how to treat people. Not all the police, but some of the bad police need training.'

Like asylum-seeking women, trafficked women felt that government departments and state agencies were disbelieving and more concerned about their immigration status and about pursuing a prosecution, than they were about the woman's safety and wellbeing.

'The police need to create a trusting atmosphere, so that trafficked women who go to the police can feel protected, supported and understood, instead of focusing on their immigration status.'

'There is such a pressure for women to prove what has happened and identify places; the police seem to be working out whether it is a provable case in the first few hours rather than addressing the needs of the woman.'

'When I was interviewed by the police they shouted at me, I'm supposed to be the victim and they were shouting at me because I didn't remember all the details, its hard for me, in this new country, the streets all look the same; it's hard for me to remember details of where things happened.'

'We need government to help us, recognise that we have been emotionally and physically abused, we are just trying to cope and be ourselves, we need help so we can stand up for ourselves in the future. We want agencies to be able to listen to us, not just asking about whether we have proof.'

'In the courts it seemed like they don't want to know what you've been through, because you are illegal they just want to get rid of you. The judge seemed like he was always on the side of the immigration officials.'

Women wanted greater recognition by agencies of what trafficked women have been through. In particular, women wanted the immigration system; police, and other

agencies to ensure women have a choice of accessing a female caseworker or officer, so that they can disclose their experiences in a safe environment.

'They should stop giving us male caseworkers, there are some things you don't want to tell a man or talk about.'

'It's important to have women-only services for women who have been abused and raped. The Poppy Project makes sure that if we have to go for interviews, it is with women. If it is a man, sometimes you feel shy or there are things we don't want to tell them.'

Women felt that if they have experienced violence and abuse, they should not be placed in detention. Many spoke of the trauma they experienced by being placed in detention, which made them feel like they were being punished and imprisoned for having suffered violence and abuse at the hands of their traffickers.

'I had a very bad experience with my caseworker when I was detained. My caseworker came to the detention centre to interview me, I was scared and very new here, I didn't know what was happening. They asked me 315 questions, I had no food, I missed lunch, they asked me the questions over and over again and in different ways and if I made any mistakes I knew they would judge my case on those mistakes, it wasn't fair, I was confused and upset and just wanted help to be safe.'

'They don't seem to consider how you feel or what you are going through – it's straight to the detention centre, all they care about is the fact you are an illegal immigrant.'

'For women like ourselves who have suffered violence, we need the government to be by our side. I went to the Home Office thinking they would protect me; instead they detained me. We need to be believed and understood, we need to be able to talk to someone who understands and listens, some women have been tortured, raped, why would we lie about this?'

'Consider us and what we have been through – my parents were killed in front of my eyes, I was genitally mutilated, I was trafficked into the UK and forced to work as a sex worker – I escaped and went to the Home Office for help and they imprisoned me.'

Women also discussed the importance of agencies identifying trafficked women who were trapped or imprisoned and unable to seek help, and of reporting their concerns to the police. They felt that if women had access to sexual health services and GPs, these services could play a key role in reporting concerns about women's safety to the police. Women said they had been denied access to healthcare services and they felt these professionals should be more proactive in targeting brothels where trafficked women are likely to end up. Women also wanted these agencies to receive compulsory training so that they would be better placed to recognise signs of trafficking and report it if they suspect a person has been trafficked.

'Doctors could help; if they treat you and see bruises they should be the ones to report your case to the police.'

'More could be done by sexual health outreach services – I know they have to be careful not to jeopardise their relationship with certain premises but I think there are opportunities that are missed there.'

'Healthcare for trafficked women is very, very important, most women have no one to speak to, the Poppy project has really helped us, they get us registered for the GP, so we can get a check up and so on. I did not see a GP or health worker until I got to Poppy.'

Women who had been trafficked into prostitution also spoke of the potential role men who buy sex had in identifying women who had been trafficked, although some feared that if men could be prosecuted for using brothels this might discourage them reporting any concerns to the police. Women suggested that there should be a national trafficking awareness campaign targeting men who buy sex, together with the introduction of a safe way for men to report suspected trafficking in the sex industry.

'It's so difficult if you are in a house and you can't go out and you have no access to services, you can't even read the newspaper, it's so difficult. Some of the conditions women were working in, men must have been aware of what was going on, so educating men to report brothels might have some effect.'

'The only people who we saw were customers – they could help us but they are not going to help you, they don't want to get caught themselves, especially if it is illegal.'

Women also said that those who are trafficked by family members could be identified if women who enter the UK were subject to follow-up visits by state agencies, to check-up on women's well-being and access to services.

'Remember that trafficking happens in the family as well - it's not just about people being locked up for sex. Checks at the airport should be followed up once in a while by going to visit a woman, see how they are doing, see if they are safe or are being kept against their will.'

Some women suggested that having information available for all women at airports at the point of entry would help, and that women perceived to be at risk of trafficking should be spoken to on their own, although they acknowledged this would be difficult to enforce. Women felt that traffickers played the system and seemed to get away with it. They all agreed that a centralised intelligence system is needed to gather information on traffickers who are repeat offenders.

'They are clever, the people who traffick, they know the system, they have different names and identities, the person who brought me here still hasn't been found. It's very difficult.'

'They need to be stopping people at the airports, making the security tighter, I'm not sure how to do it, but it needs to happen at the airports.'

'The man who brought me here, he is well known, he seems to have friends, it didn't seem hard. They didn't search us or ask us questions, I didn't even see my passport, we just walked straight through.'

'The problem with receiving information at the airport is that you don't know your situation until its too late. The person who is with you will intervene and say you don't understand English or whatever; they will speak on your behalf.'

Women spoke of the importance of being able to access women-only support services. In particular they said that more counselling and support services like those provided by the Poppy Project were needed around the country. Specifically, they said that these services offered them protection, safety and support and so played a key role in their empowerment and in preventing them to keep out of prostitution in future.

'Counselling services for women are also important, we go to counselling at Poppy but they have so many people to see, they are there for us but they can't be there all the time for all of us. More provision for counselling services for trafficked women is needed.'

'The police can't protect me. Being helped to move forward and gain some self-esteem and forget the past would feel like protection; I would feel protected if I could walk anywhere and not be scared.'

Like asylum seeking women, trafficked women who had accessed a place of safety also wanted to access education and to work so that they could earn enough money to live, instead of being forced to turn to prostitution to survive. They felt that state support to enable them to access safety, to get out of poverty and of prostitution, was lacking.

'Safe housing where we can also get support is really important, we are lucky we can stay with Poppy and we get a bit of money but other women aren't so lucky.'

'If we can't work and we don't get some money and can't get safe housing so that we can help ourselves, how can you tell other women to leave their situations if you're not going to support them? The only option they have is that they're forced back to prostitution.'

'There is this attitude that these women came from poor situations, they didn't have a choice, so that somehow what happens to them doesn't matter. Especially around prostitution, there is a perception that 'what else will these women do?' The men who buy sex are aware of this too, that we have very little choice, even here in the UK, so they use us in that way.'

Whilst women spoke of the need to prevent trafficking in the countries of origin, they felt that in many countries, prevention education was futile unless it was also accompanied by interventions to eradicate poverty. Some women, especially women from European countries, said that although they had been provided with some education in their own country about the dangers of trafficking and had seen media campaigns, they did not realise until it was too late that they were being trafficked themselves, into slavery or prostitution.

'Wherever there is poverty and people are desperate, there will still be trafficking. It's very hard to stop trafficking because of poverty out there, unless poverty is eradicated it will carry on, it's not easy.'

'How can you stop traffickers? Unless you educate everyone really well back home. But it's not just men that traffic, its women, it's your family.'

‘Women don’t realise – you are suffering in your country, and men make promises to take you to the UK with them, it seems like a dream. They treat you well; they don’t ask for anything, they seem like a boyfriend or uncle or godfather, they’re like a saviour and obviously you go with them. Some of us have been educated, we know what trafficking is, but traffickers don’t explain their intentions – they don’t tell you what they are going to do to you.’

‘I knew about trafficking, but I didn’t believe that my own family would do that to me.’

Women wanted agencies and the public to understand that traffickers were not all male strangers; some women had also been trafficked by male and female family members. They recommended the need for more comprehensive education in schools on violence against women to include awareness of trafficking, and that girls in this country can also be trafficked internally, in the sex industry. Women said there should be a national public awareness campaign to change social attitudes, so that people are aware of the reality of trafficking and understand that women who are trafficked are not to blame for their situation.

‘Violence against women is wrong; information about trafficking that doesn’t rely on stereotypes should be taught in schools from a very young age. Teaching about preventing violence against women in schools could help students because they have friends and if they know about violence they can tell their friends and help them too.’

‘We need something to address the social attitudes towards trafficked women, so that people understand we didn’t choose our situation, our hands were tied, we were forced, they shouldn’t judge us – like when people think that just because we were dressed a certain way, we deserved to be raped, it’s not fair.’

Asylum and immigration system

Asylum seeking women all spoke of their experience of the asylum, benefit, housing and justice systems as working separately and, in many cases, against each other. We heard little evidence that the welfare or wellbeing of asylum seeking women and their children was factored into the way these systems and processes are structured. Consequently these women felt abandoned, isolated, confused, and felt that their basic human rights were being denied, despite the existence of the gender equality duty and immigration guidelines on gender. We noticed a significant disparity between women’s experiences of violence and of going through the criminal justice system and that of women asylum seekers going through the asylum process.¹

‘Black women suffer discrimination. I’m not illegal, but I’m still treated as if I am, even though I’m waiting a decision on my asylum claim.’

¹ This supports the current campaign by Asylum Aid, which argues that there is an urgent need for the asylum system to learn the lessons from the criminal justice system and undergo a similar cultural shift: ‘Government’s commitment to tackling violence against women can only be taken seriously if a clear signal is sent to refugee and asylum seeking women that their experiences of violence will be treated as seriously as those of other women.’ (Asylum Aid, *Asylum Aid’s Response to HMG Consultation Paper*, 2009)

Women asylum seekers told us of their experiences of the systems set up to 'deal' with asylum seeking women, for example, of their treatment by officials during detention and removal, and of government policies which they said made them particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, exploitation and prostitution.

Women also spoke of the detrimental impact the asylum determination system had on their physical and mental health, which they said induced them into a state of constant fear of destitution, detention and deportation:

'I came to the UK because I thought I'd be safe and happy and able to practice Christianity safely. I was running from physical torture, now I'm subjected to mental torture. The Home Office should start addressing violence against women with asylum seekers, as we're terrified.'

'I didn't know about signing NHS exemptions – social services hadn't told me I was exempt. So I suffered for weeks from an incredibly painful wisdom tooth. I even went to hospital, but they said they couldn't help me. Maybe it's because I'm an older woman? My social worker told me that asylum seekers ask for too much help from them. But I need help – I sleep badly and am on anti-depressants, and worry constantly, so I can't hold information on things like bus routes in my head. I'm under mental torture.'

Some women spoke of the trauma of having been placed in detention, particularly if they had already experienced rape and torture in their country of origin. In particular they told us how they felt unsafe in detention and removal centres, of concerns they had about not having access to female staff, and of the impact of detention on their children.

'You need to look at the children because when the mother is distressed there are effects on the children, like when women are put in detention. Children are traumatised by detention officers coming to take the mother into detention. Especially in the way in which the mothers are treated.'

'Deportation nominally takes place 'with dignity' but I see no evidence of this. Its things like not being given the right sanitary pads, or the right creams, so you suffer discomfort. You're treated inhumanly.'

'When women are detained or arrested they're treated sub-humanly. They're put on the plane, taken off again. It's constant fear – you never know when they're coming for you. This is a developed country – why can they not just write to you, to tell you that your application has failed, instead of putting you in detention without telling you what's going on? Because they're afraid you'll run and hide. This treatment is deliberate: they don't want us here. A white British person would never be treated like this.'

Women asylum seekers and refugees all spoke of the humiliation and degradation they felt when they had to sign-in weekly, which they described as unnecessarily cruel and traumatic. Women spoke of the terror the weekly sign-ins triggered because they lived week by week not knowing if they would be deported or not. All of these women called for reform to this process, and advocated that monthly in-person signing-in should be introduced.

'When you go to sign in, you're immediately treated like a criminal. The Home Office's sign-in requirements – every week, every month – pique women's fears, women never know when they're going to be deported.'

Women asylum applicants found it traumatic to have to keep repeating the story of the violence they had experienced, particularly in front of their children. They also spoke of being interviewed with male relatives, which made them delay disclosing their experiences of abuse. These women wanted to be interviewed in a separate, safe, women-only environment; to be able to access female caseworkers; crèche facilities, and to have independent support and advocacy so that women's experiences of violence and resultant needs could be better identified and met.

'Children should not be in the room when their parents are interviewed, as this can be very distressing for them – as well as their parents – there are personal things about what's happened to you that shouldn't be said in front of a child.'

Although recent changes to asylum guidelines² means that some of these practices should not be happening, it was evident that amongst the women we spoke to, they felt that Gender Guidelines were not being implemented and that they were being discriminated against because they are women. It is imperative therefore that UKBA ensures the full and consistent implementation of the Gender Guidelines and their regular monitoring and review, which is consistent with the recommendations made by the 2008 CEDAW Committee, which called upon UK Governments to '...pay specific attention to the vulnerability of women asylum-seekers while their claims are under examination and to ensure the full implementation of the Asylum Gender Guidelines.'

Women were also dissatisfied with the dispersal system, and gave examples of how accommodation arrangements did not meet their needs but instead increased their isolation and vulnerability to violence:

Women asylum applicants called for speedier resolutions to asylum cases whilst recognising there needs to be a balance between timely decisions and women having time to develop trust and confidence to speak about their experiences of violence in order to inform their application. Nevertheless, most women said they were forced to wait many years before receiving a decision on their case. All women felt they were being treated inhumanely because of the length of time it takes for a decision to be made, during which women said they were not kept informed or updated about their case, and lived in constant fear of being forced into destitution or of being deported.

'I don't get anything to live on each week. My solicitor wrote to the Home Office, saying that my life is on hold and has been for 10 years. The solicitor was told that I am illegal – don't even write about me. It's impossible to live on nothing...I can't even have a relationship because of my lack of papers – and it's been 10 years!'

During this time, the government's policy of not allowing asylum applicants or refused asylum seekers to work, results in many women becoming destitute. All the women

² Asylum applicants should now be asked at screening whether they would prefer a male or female interviewer and interpreter (Asylum Instruction on *Gender Issues in the Asylum Claim*, 2006.). Also from October 2009 childcare provision should be provided for asylum interviews so that women do not have to tell their experiences in front of their children (UKBA *Code of Practice on Keeping Children Safe From Harm* which is a mandatory Code issued under Section 21 of the UK Borders Act 2007.)

we spoke to wanted to make a positive contribution and were keen to work or study. Women said they wanted to be allowed work permits and access to education in order to increase their self-esteem whilst they wait for the outcome of their case, and recognised this should result in cost savings to health and other support services.

'Giving us anti-depressants and sticking us in mental hospitals is a waste of money – just let us work. I have lived here for seven years, and don't receive any money. I want to learn, to go to college, to work, but have just been waiting for seven years, unable to do anything – I can't get learning or work.'

'Women need to work - it's a sort of therapy. This would mean they wouldn't have to go on the NHS for drugs for depression. Women also need to work for their own income, not to depend on a male for their income because that puts them at risk of exploitation.'

'Women want to be educated and to work, but can't because of a lack of papers. I tried to enrol on a course at college. I was rejected because I have a child and there was no childcare facilities, and because I have no ID, and no electricity bill or gas bill to prove who I am.'

As a consequence of having to depend on vouchers or indeed having nothing at all to live on, women told us they had to resort to prostitution. Together with their lack of access to other forms of support, this meant that many of the asylum-seeking women were isolated, vulnerable to exploitation and often trapped in violent relationships.

'Destitute women are forced into impossible situations, such as being locked in, or getting made a slave – you have no choice or you're shown the door. As a woman you have no choice. I was offered a place on the sofa of a family I met at my church, but I am not allowed to use anything in the house, the kitchen, the hot water, the bathroom, I can't even clean myself or wash clothes. I do it at night, which is hard as I am proud; I have my dignity. But I am so tired, they stay up until 2, 3 in the morning, so I can't get to sleep on the sofa. I am locked in the house when they go out. I am so afraid but dare not say anything; at least I'm not sleeping on the street.'

'People's human rights are generally respected in England, except asylum seekers' rights. Asylum seekers want to live better lives. We are forced to sell our bodies. Prostitution involves health risks. But we are not citizens; we are excluded from services, treated as objects and only as statistics.'

'The money we're given to live on - £30 per week – is far too little, and I have to cover everything for myself – food, clothes, everything... So I have to use my body to earn more – sleeping with people for money to eat, because I have to cover everything myself.'

Women asylum seekers who were placed in accommodation and those who were destitute spoke of violence and rape they had experienced, but would not report this to the police for fear of the police response and of deportation. All the women asylum seekers we spoke to felt they had no right to safety and protection because of their status, and we heard numerous examples from refugees and asylum seekers of police responding more to women's immigration status, not crimes of violence against them.

'Women who are new to this country and have come without a passport feel that they can't talk, can't ask for help, don't have any rights. Women [asylum

seekers] are far more vulnerable than other women. I too was hit on the bus, but couldn't answer back because I have no papers. Police, social services and health services should respond to reported crimes and needs, rather than a woman's immigration status. If there was more trust of the police, that the police would deal with this [being beaten] and not their immigration status, then women would seek help more.'

Experiences of women in prostitution

Some women, particularly women in the sex industry and women offenders, spoke of their experience of the care system and of how social workers failed them as children, and of the lack of support and protection available to them to recover from the child abuse they had experienced.

'I was in care; both of my parents are addicts. It was the care system that failed me. My social worker smoked crack with me.'

'The care system just contains the situation; it doesn't actually help you if you've been abused. I didn't get help then and I don't get help from anyone now. An addict is an addict for life, it's only by my own sheer determination that I'm not back on the drugs.'

'When I reported the violence to the police he left, they didn't go after him, and he came back angrier than before and I had no protection. If I had to do it again I wouldn't report; it didn't help me, it made me feel unsafe.'

'He's been to court and he's in a hospital prison but will be out soon and even more angry. There's no communication throughout the whole court process; no-one has even told me when he will be released. I'm afraid what he'll do when he comes out because he still lives there. I don't know what I'd do without being able to come here a few evenings just to chat to other women; it makes me feel I have support.'

Experiences of traveller women

'There is a great deal of prejudice against Irish Traveller women, it's not voiced but you can feel it and you can see it in the way services treat us. If this was happening to another ethnic group it would be far more high profile, we need to start tackling racism against Irish Traveller women. We live with it everyday.'

'Young Traveller girls don't stay in school, they're taken from school when they reach puberty, then they get married very young. We need education – we need to bring the education to the Travellers, so it doesn't have to be in a formal school setting and it can be linked to something they are interested in.'

'Traveller women believe it is their husband's right to have sex with her whenever they want, many of the women in my family don't understand what rape in marriage is. It shouldn't be like this, we need education and awareness campaigns at an early age. Children need to know from an early age that violence at home is not normal, it's wrong. Then you can prevent little boys growing up to be like their fathers. But it's also about teaching young girls to respect themselves and their bodies and have ownership over their own bodies.'

'I told social services and other statutory services but nobody believed me, or helped me. My husband was very clever. He told them what they wanted to

hear. They didn't speak to me. I just needed an ear, someone to listen and support me. But nothing got done; nothing went any further, when all I want is to move forward with my life.'

'It is very hard to access services when you don't read and write. The structure of services and the way they're delivered at the moment don't fit the needs of Traveller communities; services need to be more flexible with so that they meet the needs of Travellers.'

'We need outreach support from Travellers themselves, who could work with young people to prevent it happening in the future and to support survivors, women who are living with violence now. We also need awareness campaigns, to stop violence in the home being so normal. It's not normal. Men in Traveller families need to be told or made to stop being violent.'

'Travellers are at risk of being snatched from the street by other Travellers, refuges are safe but what about taking the kids to school, going to the GP, doing the shopping. Traveller women are much safer in a car; freedom for us comes with having a car. You can have your documents and your clothes in a car and you can just leave if you have to.'

'Services are not accessible for women who can't read and write, you go for help and you can't get it. There are also quite a few refuges who won't accept Irish Travellers, Women's Aid refuges. Every single day we deal with cases of Traveller women being refused accommodation in women's refuges. We have reported it, it was completely unacceptable the open discrimination she experienced. From Women's Aid, a national organisation should do something about how local services discriminate. Anti Traveller racism still exists, it's the last acceptable prejudice.'

'[A Traveller woman] in her early 20's was looking for a bed in a refuge, I was with her when she called, and they said they were full. We called again, she put on her best English accent and she had a bed in the same refuge at 4pm that afternoon.'

Irish Traveller women, who spoke of the prevalence of forced marriage and of rape within marriage, told us of their aversion to involving the police, who they said they would only contact as a last resort.

'I went to the police station with my kids to report violence, and had to wait for social services to turn up. They took my children away, they put them in a van and said they could take them for 72 hours. It's because we are Travellers and they are Traveller children, it's prejudice. My children have never been in trouble and I am a good mother, but they have these low expectations of us. I just wanted help.'

'Rape in marriage is not taken as seriously as stranger rape. If you live with a man who is beating you up, he's probably raping you as well. But if you report this, the police will not take it seriously. Having self-respect could change this; shame is a part of not reporting rape. Traveller women would never report rape, it's seen as shame on the family so it remains hidden.'

'Forced marriage still goes on but a lot less than it used to. There is awareness that it's not acceptable, but marriage is seen as a way of preserving a culture that is getting eroded. If marriages were happening later then it would be more freely chosen.'

'It is seen as scandal if a Traveller woman reported rape, she wouldn't be believed. It's all about saving face in the community. Traveller women won't confide in anyone if they are raped. They won't even tell friends because everyone tells everyone else their business. They might confess to a nun or a priest but certainly not to any other kind of professional.'

Views on the media

Although we did not specifically ask women about their views on the media, comments made clearly show both strong feelings and its influence on women's engagement with the CJS so their comments are included here.

'The media perpetuates so many myths about violence against women, and they don't face any duty of care, they perpetuate cultural attitudes of secrecy. There are subliminal messages in the reporting of violence against women, such as 'they were mugs for not leaving earlier'. Women take these on board; blame themselves. The press don't have any understanding of how hard it is to leave a violent relationship.'

'There should be media campaigns that focus on changing the behaviour of the perpetrator; at the moment campaigns are always directed at women. It's men that need to change their behaviour.'

'The reporting of the John Worboys [convicted serial rapist] case was so unfair, it was all focused on 'was she drunk, was she wearing a short skirt, she forgot herself and fell asleep', instead of focusing on the fact that a crime had been committed against these women. The media needs to be trained on gender sensitivity; they should be scored on how they report women's issues, like they are on how green they are. If they report inappropriately they should face sanctions.'

'More reporting of actual rape conviction rates of those that get to court – how many know this is 57%? – this would increase women's faith in the criminal justice system, instead of giving us percentages of total rapes, because a lot of rapes are never prosecuted.'

Confidentiality and anonymity in rape cases was considered of great importance by women who had experienced rape and sexual violence:

'The press shouldn't be allowed in the courts, it adds to the intimidating atmosphere. There are instances where women have been identified because of this. And the reporting is often very antagonistic, for the victim reading those things about herself can be like being emotionally raped all over again.'

'I've heard journalists at court taking bets on the outcomes of rape cases...volunteers and service users have been door-stepped by journalists in the past, it's not acceptable.'

Some ideas for the future

'It's not just the justice system women don't have any confidence in. Social Services, Victim Support and Police all need to be trained – they all need to be more professional in the way they treat women – it seems they're after gory details, discussing cases with one another in this way. Training is

imperative to prevent this. Experts who work in the women's sexual violence sector who understand the issues should be involved in this training.'

'Police and other agencies like housing and social services should be trained by ex drug users, by women who have been sex workers, and by rape victims, so that they can see it from the other side.'

Asylum seekers and refugees: key issues and recommendations made by women

- Human rights should be at the heart of any organisation that is providing services to women. Asylum seeking women and refugee women want to be treated with respect and dignity by statutory services, and want services to respond to their experience of crime and to their needs, not their immigration status.
- Women's services should be advertised as safe for women asylum seekers, and should not be interested in women's asylum status.
- In detention women should be entitled to a women only service (in relation to modesty / menstruation / pregnancy).
- The UK Borders Agency (UKBA) should resolve asylum cases far more quickly,
- Women should be informed of their rights, and the help available to them if they experience violence, at the point of entry into the UK.
- There should be more support groups for asylum seeking and refugee women, that are in receipt of adequate funding. For example support services like WAST need more funding as they offer a vital service to asylum seeking women.
- The number of times women have to repeat the same personal details to professionals should be reduced somehow.
- There should be awareness-raising amongst the public of what it's like to be an asylum seeker, to combat the negative attitudes portrayed in the media.
- Women need to be offered better information on culturally appropriate mental health services, and given greater choice of treatments than the anti-depressants currently on offer to them.
- Addressing violence against women involves addressing racism as well; often women are discriminated against on a number of grounds.
- Services and support for children of asylum seekers needs to be available more readily, particularly when parents of children are arrested or detained.
- Women should not be interviewed by immigration officials in the presence of their children, services should be provided for so that children are cared for during the interview process.
- Social Services must facilitate contact between detained mothers and their children so that women have regular contact with their children during detention.
- Obligatory in-person sign-in to immigration services should be monthly rather than weekly, as the weekly sign in process is very difficult for women with children and those without access to transport.

- There should be more translated information available to women who do not speak English, to ensure that they have information about services available to them.
- Women asylum seekers are often left vulnerable to exploitation due to their lack of economic independence, so women should be given every opportunity to become economically independent to prevent this kind of exploitation happening.
- The considerable skills and knowledge many asylum-seeking women have to offer should be accessed by allowing women asylum seekers to work, train, and access education in the UK.
- Women asylum seekers should be offered sufficient financial support so they are not forced into prostitution in order to survive.
- There needs to be a culture change from the current tendency towards disbelief of women asylum-seekers and refugees.
- Dispersal systems need to take into account the importance of women's social networks to women's health and well-being.
- NASS need to be more flexible with regard to accommodation payments, and allow women to have some choice in their accommodation.
- The UKBA should do outreach work in order to explain the work that they do and to improve relations amongst certain communities, in order to bridge understanding between UKBA and refugees and asylum seekers.
- More work should be done with faith communities around preventing violence against women, in order to reach asylum-seeking women and make sure they know where they can access help if they need it.
- Women want emergency services to respond to 999 calls quicker, and the same kind of service needs to be provided to every caller. Emergency services should not consider it a low priority if they hear a foreign accent or think the caller is an asylum seeker.
- Women want police to respond to the incident and victims' needs, not to a woman's immigration status; an improved police response would encourage women asylum seekers to report VAW.
- Asylum seekers need to know their rights and what support they are entitled to because services can't be relied on to have accurate information; there needs to be a national media campaign widely advertising the rights of asylum seekers and support services available to them.
- Social services need to talk to women directly, instead of relying on the husband (who might be an abuser) to interpret; and should offer support to women who report violence instead of threatening to take their children away.
- Immigration officials should be aware that immigration applications often force women to stay with violent partners, as they are often the principal applicant. An awareness campaign amongst immigration officials about the ways in

which the immigration process can be used to continue abuse against women would help.

- Staff who work in the asylum system need training to give them a greater understanding of asylum and gender issues.
- Immigration and family courts should be kept entirely separate; evidence given in one should not be used in another.
- The Home Office should have a policy of not sending women with daughters back to countries where FGM is practised.
- The recent law banning asylum seekers from marrying should be revoked.
- Women want statutory services to provide asylum seekers with the same service as everyone else; women felt services such as health, housing and social services have given asylum seekers sub standard services.
- Counselling and violence support services need more funding so they can support asylum seekers who have often experienced violence, instead of making them wait for months before getting support.

Women trafficked into the UK: key messages and recommendations made by women

- Women wanted a more believing and consistent response from police forces, in particular women felt there should be less pressure on trafficked women to provide proof of what has happened to them if they go to the police.
- Trafficked women who go to the police want to feel protected, supported and understood, instead of services focusing on their immigration status and treating them like criminals.
- A centralised intelligence system is needed to gather information on traffickers who are repeat offenders.
- Women want access to a safe environment and the option of speaking to female officers or caseworkers (in the police, in health and immigration services), so that they feel more able to disclose experiences of abuse.
- There needs to be greater recognition of what trafficked women have been through; the immigration system needs to be more gender sensitive and immigration officers need training in all forms of violence against women and girls.
- There should be a minimum standard of provision and response for trafficked women going through the immigration process, to allow them a decent standard of living, like access to safe housing and money, so that women are not forced back into prostitution.
- Women want more effective provision of health and sexual health services, and compulsory training on identifying and responding to violence against women and girls for health professionals, such as GPs and sexual health

outreach workers, so that they are able to recognise signs of trafficking and report it if they suspect a person has been trafficked.

- There should be more women-only services and greater access to specialist counselling services, including crèches and childcare, for trafficked women who seek help.
- Women want freedom to work and to get an education regardless of their immigration status.
- Tighter security at airports is needed to prevent traffickers who are familiar with the system being able to traffic women into the UK.
- There should be greater links between the UK authorities and authorities in countries of origin to prevent trafficking.
- Violence against women and girls should be taught in all schools from a young age.
- ID cards should be used to prevent trafficking and protect women who have been trafficked.
- Women wanted publicity to change social attitudes, so that people are aware of the reality of trafficking, for example to understand that families are often involved in trafficking, and that women who are trafficked are not to blame for their situations.
- Women wanted a national trafficking awareness campaign amongst men who buy sex and the introduction of a safe way for men to report suspected trafficking in the sex industry.

Traveller women: key issues and recommendations made by women

- Police and the courts need to take violence reported by Traveller women seriously; they need to offer effective protection through injunctions and bail conditions, which are robustly enforced if breached; accompanied by strong sentencing if the case gets to court.
- The police and the justice system need to respond effectively to rape within marriage, and publicise positive outcomes for women, so that Traveller communities know this is not acceptable and is a crime.
- Social services should improve their responses to Traveller women and children experiencing violence: women want to be believed and not judged when they disclose violence, and want social services to focus on women's safety as an effective form of child protection.
- Housing services need to respond more effectively to Traveller women's needs: secure safe housing needs to be available to Traveller women when they report violence if they can't stay in their own home, and Traveller women should not have to spend years in temporary accommodation.
- Local authorities should not use anti-social behaviour orders against women in cases of domestic violence.

- Counselling needs to be offered to women experiencing violence, instead of health services issuing prescriptions for anti depressants.
- Specialist community outreach support is needed for Traveller women and girls experiencing violence, accompanied by awareness campaigns targeted at Traveller communities, which educates communities about violence against women and girls, about rape in marriage, and about support services available, and challenges the culture that normalises and condones violence against women and girls.
- Anti-Traveller racism within statutory services and specialist support services needs to be tackled: all agencies need to be trained to respond effectively to the needs and experiences of Traveller women experiencing violence, to minimise the prejudice and discrimination they might experience from generic and specialist violence against women services.
- The national network of women's refuges should not discriminate against, and should provide accessible services for, Traveller women and their children, and Women's Aid should raise awareness of the needs of Travellers amongst local services.
- Work to raise awareness of, and to prevent, forced marriage within Traveller communities needs to be developed and delivered by Travellers themselves, who could build trust and confidence amongst women in those communities.
- There needs to be greater effort and investment in educating and empowering Traveller women and girls: schools, outreach and adult education services need to support Traveller women to learn to read and write, and to learn a trade which would give them financial independence.
- Work with Traveller men and boys needs to take place (e.g. by chaplains, in communities, in prisons) to educate them that violence against women and girls is unacceptable.

Women sex workers: key issues and recommendations made by women

- Women wanted the criminal justice system to use CCTV evidence more effectively, because they reported police not bothering to check CCTV evidence when sex workers have been attacked near cameras.
- Women felt they were no longer seen as a priority if they had called the police numerous times and they had not pressed charges; so women wanted the police to respond more quickly to 999 calls, regardless of whether they have called them in the past.
- Women want access to a safe police station, open 24 hours a day that they could go to, to report violence.
- There should be specialist officers who have had training (from sex workers) so they understand the situation facing women who are street sex workers; women would then feel more comfortable reporting violence to them.

- Women understood that at present rape victims with a criminal record cannot claim compensation, so they wanted the rules on compensation for victims of crime to be changed.
- Women wanted access to safe housing and refuge provision for women who are using drugs or who are sex workers, because they often have to go back to violent partners because there is no safe place for them to go to escape a violent partner.
- Women wanted more joined up support between support services so that women who are in violent relationships and using drugs can access safety and support, where counsellors visit and key workers understand their situation.
- Women wanted access to more women-only spaces in drugs services; more support to help them get off the drugs with the view of getting their children back if they have been removed.
- Women trying to exit prostitution wanted access to services that provide activities, education, training and help and support to get back into employment; and services that help empower them and build self esteem so that they can make other lifestyle choices and realise what they feel they are capable of.
- Women who are trying to exit prostitution and get off drugs want opportunities to meet others who are not involved in that lifestyle.
- Women wanted to access help in one place from one keyworker who can tell them about the range of support services available, instead of having to go to lots of different agencies.
- Women wanted immediate and accessible women's services, where they don't have to wait for months or have to make an appointment.
- All women said the sexual abuse they experienced as children was one of the main reasons for their current drug use and sex-work. They recommended that support and counselling should be available to children who have been sexually abused, to help them deal with what has happened and prevent their lives becoming chaotic when they grow up.
- Women wanted schools to play a key role in detecting and responding to signs of violence in children.
- Women wanted all children to be educated about their rights and where they can access help and support if they need to, if they have experienced violence and abuse.
- Women want local authorities to provide support and safety for women sex workers instead of taking out ASBOs on women in prostitution to remove them from the area, because this denies them access to health and support services, which further endangers women.

- Services need to be more flexible to the needs of women in prostitution, and should be available when women need the service, because they often have a chaotic lifestyle.
- Women want the police and justice system to collect and use evidence more effectively.
- Housing services need to take women's allegations of threats, harassment and attacks from other tenants seriously, and complaints system should be in place to enable tenants to voice their concerns.
- Victims of 'stranger' violence need to be kept informed throughout the court process and notified in advance if perpetrators are due to be released from custody or prison.
- Women want women's services that are accessible for the most vulnerable groups and for women without English as a first language, that are available out of hours, are holistic and provide a safe space to talk with other women to share experiences and get mutual support; a place to access health, advice and support services under one roof, such as counselling, advocacy, housing and legal advice, activities and workshops.
- Statutory services need to engage with women directly, instead of making assumptions about what they need; and women want statutory services to respond to the immediate incident of violence and to women's current needs, instead of judging women on their past experience or lifestyle.
- Women want the police and statutory services to receive training from service users, such as women who have worked in prostitution, so they can have some understanding of what it's like to be on the receiving end of the agency response.
- Women want the care system to support children in care and to identify violence and provide support, instead of just containing the situation until girls are sixteen.
- Rape alarms should be given to all women, especially women in prostitution.
- Women want more designated safe women-only beds or hostels for homeless women that provide support for women as opposed to simply getting them off the streets.
- Counselling services like those provided to women in prison should be available for women who have experienced violence against women.
- Public attitudes towards women and violence against women need to be challenged, it should not be seen as more acceptable to attack a woman wearing a short skirt.
- When incidences of violence against women are reported to the police a male and female police officer should be sent.

- Police need to stop viewing violence against women as a 'disturbance' and arresting both parties; police need training on identifying the primary perpetrator at an incident.
- Police need to offer proper protection to women who report violence against women by ensuring the perpetrator stays away; this would encourage women to report.
- Free self defence classes should be offered to all women.

Women survivors of sexual violence: key issues and recommendations made by women

- Women need to be referred to services that offer separate provision and support from female workers, which take into account their experiences of violence and abuse.
- Perpetrators should receive sentences appropriate to the crime committed.
- All services that work with survivors of sexual violence (social services, victim support, police, health) should have training; this training should involve the sexual violence sector in its delivery.
- Women should be provided with an independent advocate to support them through the criminal justice system; and there should be more engagement between the police and specialist services.
- There should be alternative options for women who don't want to go down the conventional route of prosecution or for women who are too scared to report to the police.
- Social attitudes need to be challenged so that victims of sexual abuse aren't stigmatised; then they are more likely to speak to someone about what has happened and seek help. There should also be media campaigns directed at men, asking them to change their behaviour, instead of always focussing on women's behaviour. The media should face sanctions if they report violence against women inappropriately.
- Healthy relationships and preventing violence against women should be taught in schools to both boys and girls to make young people more emotionally literate.
- There should be information available to women, which explains what happens when a woman reports to the police, so she is aware of the following stages and can make a more informed choice about whether to report. Often women don't report because they don't know what to expect.
- Statutory services need to be more trusting of women instead of routinely disbelieving them; sexist attitudes towards women still exist within the higher levels of services and this kind of culture must be challenged.

- The criminal justice system should sign up to a victim-focussed ethos, which aims to support victims instead of making them feel that they have to fight against the system.
- Methods need to be in place to make the experience of giving evidence less traumatic for the victim, and the press should not be allowed in courts hearing cases of violence against women; this makes it even more distressing for the victim giving evidence.
- Jurors need training on the realities of violence against women so that they are not influenced by myths and stereotypes that dominate the media and social attitudes when making judgements.
- There needs to be more reporting of actual conviction rates of cases that get to court, to increase women's confidence and encourage women to report.
- Women's services that support victims of violence need secure long term funding.
- Women need financial support; the benefits system should be adapted and staff given training so that women can have their claim processed quickly and sensitively.
- Sanctuary housing schemes that allow women to stay in their homes should be extended so that they are more widely available.
- The NHS needs a more gender sensitive approach to care, especially in mental health services.
- Women who are assaulted by carers should be able to access the same kind of care and support quickly so that they aren't fearful of reporting the abuse and subsequently being left helpless.
- There should be more one-stop shops, which offer a holistic service to women experiencing violence.
- The media and government should report successful convictions for rape, instead of subliminally blaming the victim in their reporting or not publicising successful convictions of the cases that get to court.
- There should be a campaign on local and national levels to challenge social attitudes about sexual abuse and the secrecy that surrounds it and bring it into the public domain. This should be supported by widespread advertising of sexual violence support services and secure funding for these support services to deal with an increase in demand.
- There needs to be more partnership between GPs and sexual violence support services so GPs know where to signpost women who have experienced rape and sexual violence.
- The systems and processes within the CPS need to be far more supportive of the victim, and make sure victims are kept informed about the progress of the case.

- Social attitudes and stereotypes of professionals within the criminal justice system and the juries involved in cases of violence against women need to be challenged so that these attitudes do not influence the outcome of cases.
- Campaigns such as 'This is Not An Invitation To Rape Me' should be promoted to challenge myths and stereotypes about violence against women in wider society.
- The police need to work in partnership with sexual violence support services. It is often as a result of the support these services provide that women decide to report, and it is sexual violence support services who continue to support women throughout the case and after the verdict is delivered.
- Victims of violence going to court to give evidence need good quality independent advocacy and support from trained professionals.
- Women who give evidence in court need to be guaranteed special measures, it should not be left to the judge discretion.
- The justice system needs to invest resources (training etc) into ensuring police respond sensitively to incidences of violence, if women are not treated with dignity when first reporting violence it is unlikely they will continue to support the prosecution.
- Teachers and other staff in schools need training so they know how to respond to signs of violence, where to signpost and how to deal with the consequences of disclosure.
- Children need to be made aware of child sexual abuse and where to go to access help. Schools also need to work to create an environment where children feel able to disclose any abuse they are experiencing.
- Adults need education about violence, the forms it can take, and where to access help. Many women may not realise they are in abusive relationships or may have been abused as children and need support.
- Specialist support should be available to children who have witnessed violence.
- Social services need to ensure they don't persecute the mother for the behaviour of the perpetrator; too often the onus is on the mother when she is a victim herself.
- Sexual Assault Referral Centres should be available locally so women don't have to travel so far to get help after the trauma of sexual assault.
- There is a need for more partnership between local agencies, especially in response to women with 'no recourse to public funds' so services know what support they can or cannot provide.
- There should be more advertising of violence against women support services in different languages and translators should be available to support these women.

- The government need to invest more money into services that are trying to support vulnerable groups of women such as disabled women or sex workers.
- GPs should be required to have training on violence against women so that they offer a more sophisticated response to women than just anti depressants.
- Violence against women should be compulsory in the curriculum. There should be a zero tolerance policy on any forms of violence and myths and stereotypes surrounding violence against women and girls should be challenged and prevented. Any attempt to change social attitudes should be led by the statutory sector.

Women survivors of FGM: key messages and recommendations made by women

- Women wanted the government to reassure people that helping others is a positive thing and they will not get into trouble, because there is a lack of community support for women who had experienced FGM, and women are too afraid to help each other.
- There needs to be more of a focus on prevention instead of picking up the pieces once violence against women has already happened.
- The NHS needs to respond to the needs of women and create an environment which is less time restricted and more supportive.
- Health professionals need training on FGM so they can respond sensitively and appropriately to women who have undergone FGM, and women in labour also need access to support workers from their own community, and interpreters where necessary, and proper aftercare after giving birth.
- Schools should act to prevent abuse of Somali children at school and to challenge racist stereotypes and violence between children.
- Women wanted somewhere to confidentially report violence if they did not feel comfortable going to the police.
- All women should receive an equal standard of service from statutory services, regardless of their background.
- The government should support community groups to lead the change in re-educating communities that practise FGM, and FGM should be taught to all children (not just children from FGM practising countries) as part of sex education to make young people aware of FGM.
- Girls should not be physically examined without the consent of their mothers.
- Parents and the community generally, should be educated on the health risks of FGM, and the fact it is against the law and not supported by religion.
- Men should be educated so that they no longer want women to be circumcised, and there should be a clear message sent out to perpetrators of FGM that they will be imprisoned for up to fourteen years.

- Pregnant women and new mothers should be educated about the risks of FGM by their midwives/health visitor to discourage them from circumcising their own children. If they still maintain they want to circumcise their daughter, the police should be involved.
- GPs could identify children who are being immunised in preparation for returning to Africa, and intervene at this point to discuss the health risks of FGM and the fact it is illegal, and when families return to the UK from a trip home they should be asked about FGM and if they suspect FGM has taken place girls could be examined (examination of girls was disputed within the group).
- There should be services in place for young women who have undergone FGM so that they don't have to wait until they are having problems with maternity to access services – women need to be able to access help with FGM at any stage.
- There needs to be more specialised services for women who have undergone FGM or who are at risk of undergoing FGM.

Women experiencing domestic violence (and its subsets of forced marriage and so-called honour based violence): key issues and recommendations made by women

- Publicise the law relating to all forms of violence against women violence
- Awareness need to be raised of the extent and prevalence of domestic violence including that it is prevalent in all communities. Indeed data from the BCS suggests that geography and ethnicity have no impact on prevalence at all.
- Increase awareness that rape / sexual abuse is a common part of domestic violence and that it is as illegal as rape / sexual abuse of a stranger.
- Prevention work should be implemented within schools
- Women need to feel that they will be believed, not dismissed and supported if they speak out about domestic violence.
- All schools should display forced marriage posters (available from the Forced Marriage Unit)
- The level of awareness of support services was very low so there should be more publicity of what help is available. It may also be helpful for services to think about specific outreach staff to engage with diverse communities.
- Women with whom we consulted wanted access to local women's groups which did not focus solely on violence but which also offered a social, fun element. Given the widely negative views held of Social Services, this potentially offers an opportunity for Social Workers to 're-brand' their image with local residents.
- GP's and health services were widely viewed as a credible, trustworthy source of help. Opportunities to build on this should be explored.

- Publicise that Childline is available to all children and young people including adolescents.
- Drug services should implement routine screening for domestic and sexual violence in their client group for both victims and perpetrators.
- All services need to improve on pro-active screening for experiences of domestic violence, including implementing the offer of a female member of staff for all clients.³
- Police to do more community outreach to further build public confidence.
- The FMU help-line to be more widely publicised

³ It should be noted that whilst this has the potential to place an unfair burden on female staff within a service, experience shows that the recognition by male staff that disclosures may be difficult to someone of the opposite sex is often sufficient to reassure female victims.