

SOCIAL JUSTICE PULSE REVIEW 2025

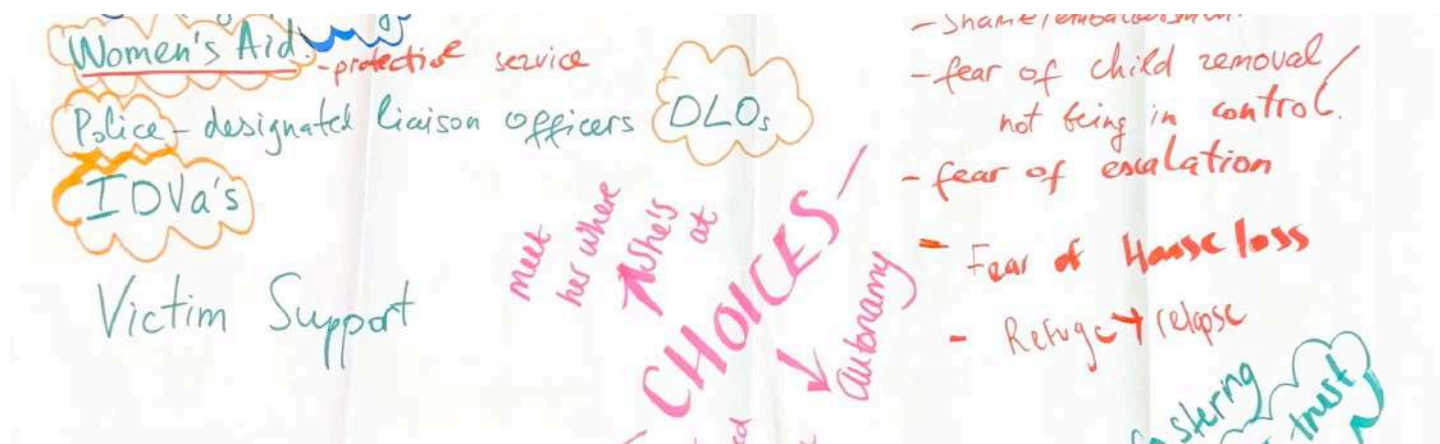
COST OF LIVING, HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND RACE EQUITY

Supporting Women in Crisis and Beyond: Mapping and Engaging with Services in the North-East of England

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Project Summary

Women in the North-East (NE) suffer from poor life-course outcomes and health and care inequities compared to their peers across England. The voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector can support women facing acute and chronic crises (e.g., mental health, domestic/sexual violence, poverty). We explored available support and engaged with NE organisations to develop ways of working together to support women in crisis and beyond.



The Challenge

Evidence demonstrates gendered inequities in health where women often suffer more than men from a host of nonfatal, disabling physical and mental illnesses (Borrell et al., 2013). Moreover, women live fewer years in good health despite having a greater life expectancy than men. Health disparities between men and women are related to socio-economic status, ethnicity and geographic region (Allen and Sesti, 2018). Social and economic factors influence health, including early childhood experiences, education, family building, and working life. Their impacts extend into retirement and older age. VCSEs make meaningful contributions to addressing health and care gaps. However, we know less about women-led support offered to women in the region and how organisations work together to effect change.

We undertook a mapping exercise to identify organisations and support accessible to women in Northumberland, Newcastle and Gateshead. Building on this, we delivered two in-person workshops (29

participants) to bring together organisations and women to explore engagement and support (e.g., barriers and opportunities for improved collaboration).

Findings

Of 17 non-statutory women and girls' organisations in Newcastle-Gateshead and Northumberland, 15 are women-led. These focus on the empowerment of women and girls and advocacy for those experiencing multiple disadvantages, including support for women impacted by domestic abuse or who are socially vulnerable.

Workshop participants identified:

1. Public misunderstanding of women's representation in society and what their health and well-being looks like.
2. Gaps in understanding the remit of available services and support in the region:
 - Information can be overwhelming/complex to navigate, and needs better coordination
 - Training on other organisations' procedures/processes is needed for appropriate referral and maintaining confidentiality and rapport with women.
 - Funding model within women's/VCSE sector leaves organisations to 'battle' for funding; this risks good, sustained partnership working between organisations and women.
3. Barriers to accessing services: Cost/financial issues (e.g., taxis, parking) and transportation issues, particularly in rural Northumberland.
 - Lack of time to engage with services.
 - Feelings of shame and embarrassment due to stigma associated with adverse life events (e.g., trauma, violence, substance misuse).
 - Fear e.g., losing one's home/children after disclosing problems, being let down by organisations.
 - Mainstream services are often constrained to deliver a particular model of intervention, which is rarely holistic or women-centred. Women want a say in what they feel might be best for them.

Recommendations

- To enhance communication/collaboration between organisations and women, participants suggested:
- Regular networking events between organisations and women, to deepen connections share how organisations work
 - Increased contact with statutory services to help promote regional women-focused support.
- Ongoing mapping exercises to facilitate understanding of available services and changes in referral/access, to support promotion of best practice.
- More longitudinal research to develop knowledge around organisations and support for women and girls, and their impacts on women and girls' lives.
 - More opportunities for co-production with organisations and women.
 - Explore the social return on investment of women's and girls' organisations to demonstrate their impact.

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