

The impact of cuts on the provision of services to prevent violence against women and girls

This article provides a summary of the full research report; *Measuring the impact of cuts in public expenditure on the provision of services to prevent violence against women and girls*¹.

'The effect on local services is both dramatic and uneven.'

We all agree that the ending of violence against women and girls (VAWG) is an important goal of public policy. The Home Secretary, Theresa May, states that "No level of violence against women and girls is acceptable in modern Britain or anywhere else in the world...As women and as a society we have made great strides but we need to do more to ensure that women and future generations are not held back. My ambition is nothing less than ending violence against women and girls." (Home Office 2011) But the cuts in public expenditure potentially threaten the provision of services to prevent VAWG.

Our report, funded by Northern Rock Foundation and Trust for London, reviewed the data on changes in service provision to prevent violence against women and girls. It draws on 20 sources of published and unpublished information, investigating what data is available on changes in services. It explores the complexity of the connections between changes in funding and in services. It asks what we need in order to provide an appropriate knowledge base to support the provision of services to prevent gender-based violence against women and girls.

Data was provided by or on: Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse; Children England; Coventry Women's Voices; Eaves; Forced Marriage Unit; False Economy; London

Voluntary & Community Sector; End Violence Against Women (EVAW); IMKAAN; National Council for Voluntary Organisations; Rape Crisis; Refuge; Respect; Rights of Women; Women's Aid Federation of England; Scottish Women's Aid; Welsh Women's Aid; and the Women's Resource Centre.

The investigation found that substantial cuts in national budgets are leading to cuts in local services to prevent and protect against VAWG. The effect on local services is both dramatic and uneven. This is despite the introduction of some new national funding streams (e.g. for Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA), Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA) and Rape Crisis). The data to assess changes is itself, however, complex, uneven and incomplete.

Local authority cuts to funding

The clearest evidence of cuts in funding to local services was found in data collected by the False Economy project from local authorities using Freedom of Information (FoI) Act requests², and analysed by the research team. There was a cut of 31% in the funding of the domestic violence and sexual abuse sector by local authorities between 2010/11 to 2011/12, a reduction of £2.4m from £7.8m to £5.4m, as shown in graph 1.

Notes

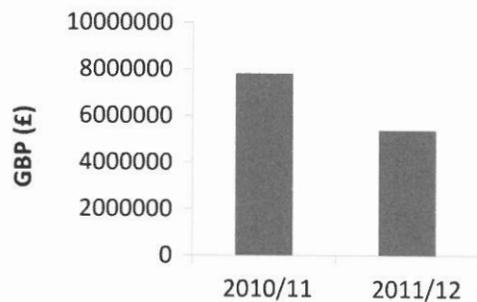
¹ The full report, Jude Towers and Sylvia Walby (2012) *Measuring the impact of cuts in public expenditure on the provision of services to prevent violence against women and girls* Northern Rock Foundation and Trust for London, is at: <http://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/VAWG%20Full%20report.pdf>

² False Economy is hosted by the TUC: <http://falseeconomy.org.uk/blog/exclusive-more-than-2000-charities-and-community-groups-face-cuts>. 264 out of 353 LAs responded to these Freedom of Information requests; 63 organisations that had experienced reduction in their LA funding between that was greater than 5% are included in the analysis.

Organisations receiving smaller amounts of funding from local authorities had more substantial funding cuts than those receiving larger amounts: among those with local authority funding of less than £20,000 the average cut was 70% as compared with 29% for those receiving over £100,000, between 2010/11 and 2011/12, as illustrated in graph 2.

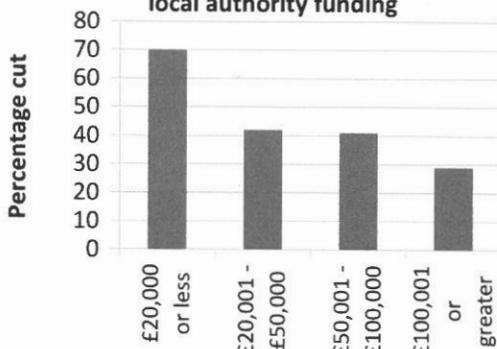
Graph 1

Local Authority funding to the domestic violence & sexual abuse voluntary sector 2010/11 - 2011/12



Graph 2

Average funding cut in 2011/12 for organisations by size (£) of 2010/11 local authority funding



Cuts in specific services

Most of the service providers who provided information, reported on their experience of cuts. Many reported on uncertainty about budgets and fears of further cuts. A few examples are noted here - IMKAAN, IDVAs, RESPECT, statutory provision, and Women's Aid (including UKROL) - others can be found in the full report³.

IMKAAN, a national second tier organization that acts as a voice for VAWG services for women from Black Asian Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) groups, report becoming aware of the closure of two specialist BAMER refuges and two services attached to a specialist refuge⁴.

The number of IDVAs has been reduced; in 2011 of eight major IDVA service providers supporting 13,180 clients, two faced funding cuts of 100%, three cuts of 50%, three of 40% and two of 25%⁵.

RESPECT services working to reform male perpetrators of domestic violence suffered budget cuts so that between 2010 and 2011 78% of services reduced the number of clients they were able to assist⁶.

Statutory provision, including those police and court services that involve specialised expertise, has been reduced following funding cuts. This includes cuts in the operating levels of Domestic Abuse Officers, a unit on female genital mutilation, and specialist domestic violence courts (data from Home Office and Ministry for Justice).

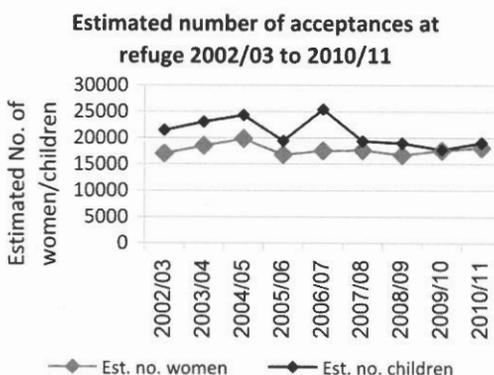
Women's Aid

The headline data, provided by Women's Aid, was that 320 women, just under 9% of those seeking shelter, were turned away each day by Women's Aid services in 2011 due to lack of space.

Data from surveys conducted annually by Women's Aid of its affiliated organisations⁷, were analysed by the research team. This data does not show a reduction in the last year in the number of women and children accepted by refuges. As can be seen in the graph 3, the year 2006/7 appears to be the high point in terms of the numbers helped, but that if 2005/6 is taken as a base, then the numbers helped have fluctuated between 2005/6 and 2010/11, rather than showing a clear change up or down.

The UKRefuges-on-Line (UKROL) database, co-ordinated by Women's Aid, shows a slightly different picture⁸.

Graph 3



'The number of IDVAs has been reduced; in 2011 of eight major IDVA service providers supporting 13,180 clients, two faced funding cuts of 100%, three cuts of 50%, three of 40% and two of 25%.'

Notes

3 Jude Towers and Sylvia Walby (2012) Measuring the impact of cuts in public expenditure on the provision of services to prevent violence against women and girls Northern Rock Foundation and Trust for London, is at: <http://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/VAWG%20Full%20report.pdf>

4 Anjum Mouj (2008) A Right to Exist - A paper looking at the eradication of specialist services to BAMER women and children fleeing violence: Experiences of BAMER refuges (IMKAAN), http://www.imkaan.org.uk/index_html_files/A%20Right%20to%20Exist.pdf

5 CAADA poll reported in Children & Young People Now, March 2011 http://www.cypnow.co.uk/Social_Care/article/1058437/Domestic-violence-victims-children-risk-support-services-cut/).

6 RESPECT London datasets are at <http://www.respect.uk.net/pages/respect-london-members.html>.

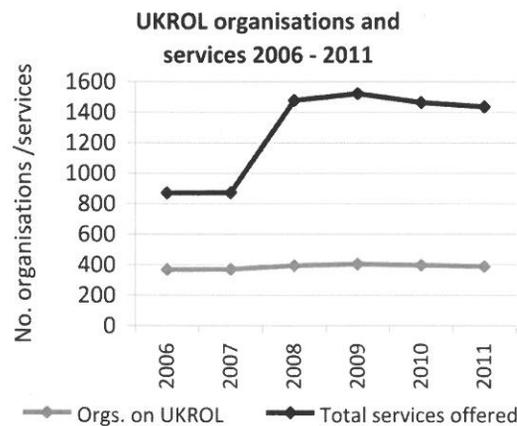
7 In the annual survey the response rate is around 65-70%.

8 UKROL is a UK-wide online information system.

'The relationship between cuts in budgets and cuts in services is not simple. There is a changing relationship between national funding and local services at the same time as cuts in national budgets.'

Using this information source, 2009 appears to be the high point in terms of the number of organisations and services (as can be seen from the table 1 and graph 4), with 405 organisations and 1523 services; while the numbers in 2011 appear lower, with 387 (4% fewer) organisations and 1426 (6% fewer) services. Within the category of 'services', there are declines between 2009 and 2011 in the number of refuges (304 to 292), floating support (146 to 120) and outreach (203 to 196).

Graph 4



Notes

9 False Economy: <http://falseeconomy.org.uk/blog/exclusive-more-than-2000-charities-and-community-groups-face-cuts>.

10 Chancellor George Osborne 20 October 2010 Spending Review Statement http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spend_sr2010_speech.htm.

11 Housing Minister Grant Shapps press statement 25/1/2011 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/issuesandresponses/newsroom/1825375>

12 Inside Housing 20 October 2010, 'Supporting People budget reduced', <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/care-and-support/supporting-people-budget-reduced/6512140.article>

13 Chancellor's 'Spending Review Statement' on Treasury site http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spend_sr2010_speech.htm

14 For example Inside Housing 22 July 2011: (<http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/care/hyde-sells-bulk-of-care-arm-to-family-mosaic/6516795.article>) states that 'The government announced last October that Supporting People funding would be cut by 11.5 per cent, from £6.8 billion to £6 billion.'

15 Housing Minister Grant Shapps press statement 25/1/2011 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/issuesandresponses/newsroom/1825375>; also Equalities Minister Lynne Featherstone at Women's Aid AGM 1/2/2012.

16 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/17958593.pdf>

made at local level, since most services are provided locally (e.g. 'Supporting People' from the Department of Communities and local government (DCLG) gives money to local authorities (councils) which then fund local refuges). Since 2009 ring-fencing has been removed from budgets so that local authorities have greater 'choice' in how to prioritise the services that they fund, and of tendering of services, so that competition over price becomes more important in the selection of service provider. The removal of ring-fencing means that there is less connection between the funding national government provides and the spending on local services. However, there have also been some changes in the reverse direction since 2010, such as increased direct national funding for some services (e.g. some rape crisis centres, IDVAs and ISVAs).

The cuts in national budgets and in funds provided to local services can be identified in three major types of figures: local authority spend on VAWG services; the overall budget provided by % to local authorities; and the Supporting People money provided by % to local authorities. Various estimates of the size of these cuts have been made.

There were cuts of 31%, over one year (the last year) in the money given by local authorities to domestic violence and sexual abuse services, according to our calculations based on data provided by False Economy⁹.

There were cuts in funding to councils, reported variously as 7.1% in funding to councils each year for the four years of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) by the Treasury¹⁰ and as 4.4% cuts each year for four years (CSR) by the DCLG¹¹.

There are two estimates of the cuts in Supporting People. The first is an estimate

The fluctuation in numbers of women accessing services does not necessarily correlate with the number of services provided for reasons including varying lengths of stay, size of service and other factors.

What are the cuts in the budgets?

The relationship between cuts in budgets and cuts in services is not simple. There is a changing relationship between national funding and local services at the same time as cuts in national budgets.

Most income to VAWG services originates in national level funding, while most cuts to budgets for specific service providers are

Table 1: UKROL changes in provision

Year	Organisation	Services	Refuge	Floating support	Outreach
2006	367	871	297	140	199
2007	369	873	297	140	199
2008	394	1479	298	141	196
2009	405	1523	304	146	203
2010	396	1465	296	137	194
2011	387	1436	292	120	196

of a cut of 11.5% over the whole four years of the CSR by Inside Housing¹² (that is 2.9% per year); based on Treasury data that Supporting People would receive £6bn over four years¹³. Many commentators have used this figure¹⁴. However, according to %, the cut was smaller - 1% in one year of the 'supporting people housing programme' of funding for local authorities¹⁵. This is based on more recent % data of a reduction in Supporting People from £1,636m in 2010/11 to £1,590m in 2014/15¹⁶ (a £6.5bn budget over four years). The difference in estimates of the cut appears to be based on the different size of Supporting People stated by the % (£6.5bn) and the Treasury (£6bn). While both estimates (2.9% and 1%) are reasonable (both are based on government provided data), it is likely that the % figure of 1% is more accurate since it is based on more recent and less aggregated data.

There are thus various figures for budget cuts relevant to VAWG services. Local authorities appear to have reduced spending on domestic violence and sexual abuse services by 31%, according to False Economy data. The reduction in the funding to councils is either 7.1% (Treasury) or 4.4% (%). The reduction in the national budget for Supporting People is either 1% per year (%) or 2.9% per year (Inside Housing, based on Treasury data). The % Equalities Impact Statement notes that there was an attempt to reduce the impact of the cuts on the most vulnerable groups, hence the smaller cut to the Supporting People programme than other funding streams. However, since the demise of ring-fencing (initially 2009, extended in 2010), councils are not obliged to protect their housing programmes, vulnerable people or refuge provision in priority over other services.

In conclusion, it would appear that while the % intended to protect spending on vulnerable people with proportionately smaller cuts to the Supporting People programme (1% or 2.9%) than to local authority budgets overall (7.1% or 4.4%), the actual cuts to the funds given by local authorities to domestic violence and sexual abuse services were larger (31%).

Effects of cuts in budgets on services not yet complete

The full effect of public sector funding cuts resulting from the Comprehensive Spending Review and other changes in government policy and practice will not be realised immediately; rather the full impact of these changes for the VAWG service sector and for the women and children it supports will take some time to become clear. This is partly because the cuts in local authority budgets from April 2010 will not yet have materialised in cuts to services at the point at which services were reported to us at the end of 2010; and partly because organisations are likely to have run down reserves to protect services in the immediate term.

Reflections on data needs

During engagement with journalists over the report we were insistently asked for a single 'killer statistic' about the extent of the cuts in VAWG services. If we had this, we were told, the report would be a candidate for a front page news story. Regretfully we did not have such a figure; and we did not make the front page.

But could we develop one? A single indicator that would convey to the general public in stark simple terms the reduction in VAWG services that was occurring and be robust enough to withstand intense critical scrutiny?

The data produced by the VAWG sector is complicated for several reasons, including the large number of service and data providers and the different categories in which data is collected. If different data is collected then it is hard to build up a picture of the VAWG sector as a whole. In order to assess changes in service provision across the VAWG sector as a whole, it would be necessary to have the same data from each organisation or service provider, collected together at a single point, year after year. Ideally, data would have been collected in each of several different ways or at the least in one way that was common across the services: change to number/ percentage of services/ organisations; change to the number/

percentage of clients assisted; reduction in the number/percentage of staff; sum/ percentages of money cut from services; demonstrated and/or changes in need.

More ambitious, would be the collection of data that would enable the investigation of possible connections between changes in funding, changes in services and changes in the level of violence against women and girls. This would require: a robust map of service provision and numbers helped; a robust account of impact of services on VAWG; and a robust measurement of changes in level of VAWG. This is challenging since services are inter-connected and it is not really possible to identify the impact of single services robustly, so the investigation requires knowledge of the whole sector.

Then we would have a robust knowledge base on the impact of services on the level of VAWG. Perhaps this is for the future?

Conclusions

There have been significant but uneven cuts to budgets and to services. The cuts in funds from councils to services to prevent violence against women and children appear to be disproportionately larger than the overall cuts to council budgets. The full effects of the cuts have not yet been felt. The monitoring of these effects requires better data than is currently routinely collected.

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