

Why refuges are not local services

Briefing Paper 4

November 2018

Key points:

- Refuges are a crucial and distinctive domestic violence service
- Though many women stay local when they seek help, refuges are vital for women who need to travel away
- Refuges enable women and children to relocate to a new area – so they are not really local services
- Refuges should not just be planned and funded locally

Data in this briefing from Supporting People Programme of housing-related support services.

Department for Communities and Local Government and University of St Andrews, Centre for Housing Research (2012) *Supporting People Client Records and Outcomes, 2003/04-2010/11: Special Licence Access [computer file]*. Colchester, Essex, UK Data Archive [distributor]. Available from: <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7020-1>>

Refuges are a crucial service for women and children

Women's domestic violence refuges have existed in the UK since the 1970s in many – but not all – local areas; providing temporary accommodation and a range of support services for women escaping interpersonal violence.

They have been set up and maintained generally with local authority support; emphasising local approaches and local commissioning and funding.

In the UK, refuge stays of 6 months or more are part of a model of providing time in a safe space to deal with both practical and emotional issues, so that

most women will be expecting to move out to independent living.

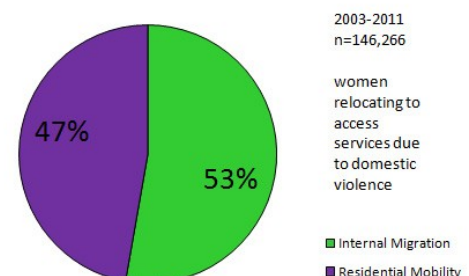
Refuges therefore provide much more than just safe accommodation; they provide specialist support for both women and children to deal with their experiences and move on with their lives.



"I have enjoyed parties in the refuge as everyone comes together"

Many women and children stay local when they seek help

When women relocate to access services because of domestic violence, it's about half-and-half whether they stay in their own local authority area ("residential mobility") or move to another local authority ("internal migration").



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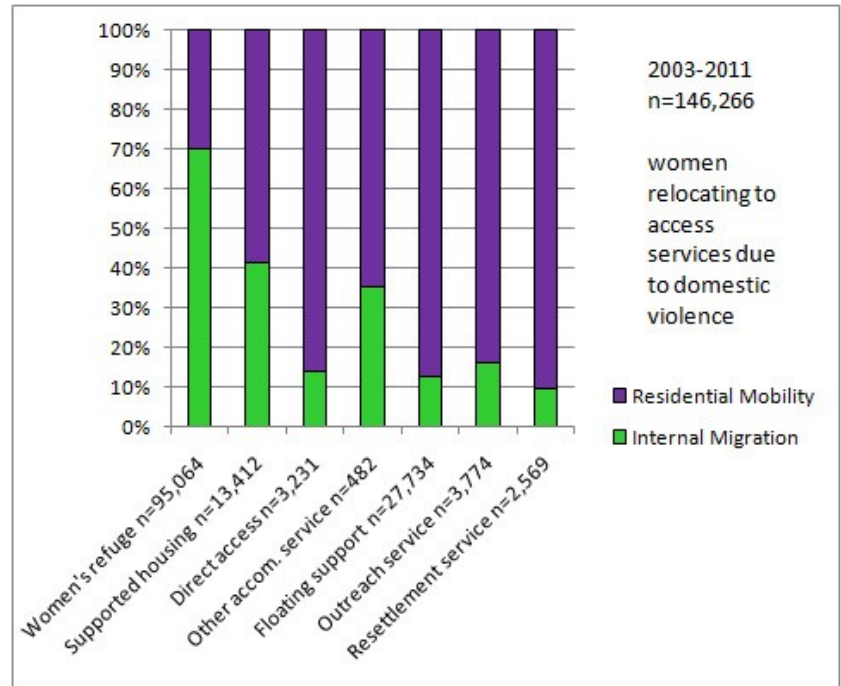
FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

www.womensjourneyscapes.net



Whether women and children stay local varies enormously between different types of services

- For support services that do not provide accommodation 80-90% of women are from the local area; and for non-refuge accommodation around two-thirds are similarly from the local area.
- But, for women's refuges, 70% of women have travelled from another area.



Women's refuges are not really local services

Successive national governments have regarded women's refuges as local services and not provided national planning or funding for sufficient capacity or distribution around the country.

Despite the crucial role of refuges, not all councils have ever provided them. And this is not really a problem for their local women and children — who would be going to refuges elsewhere anyway.

Being planned and funded locally, also makes refuges particularly vulnerable to cutbacks — because local cuts do not primarily have a local impact — they affect women and children nationally.

Local women and children everywhere might need women's refuges; but they need them all around the country.

When women and children need refuges, they generally need them not in their original local area—so we are planning and funding refuges at the wrong scale of government.