

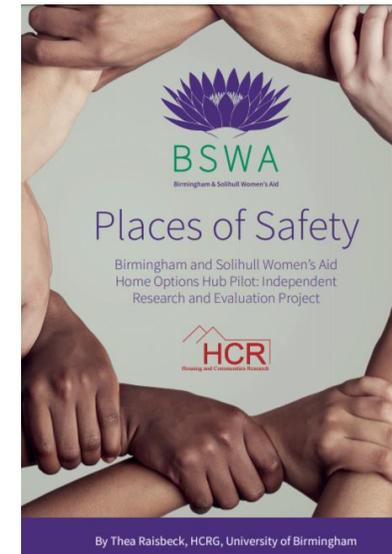
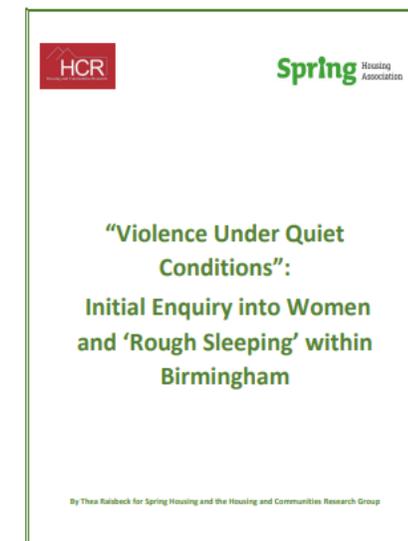
# Being Missed or Missing Out?

## ‘Rough Sleeping’ through a Gendered Lens

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- Research and learning around ‘women-specific’ outreach service and piloted ‘pathway’ in Birmingham
- Particular focus on the experiences of women within homelessness practices / ‘systems’ (inc. ‘exempt accommodation’)
- Close work with practitioners (and ‘ethnographic participation’) – accessible, practice and policy focussed
- How women are (or are not) being served by existing rough sleeper outreach activity (funding, structure, culture and practices)
- ‘Women’ – a shorthand that loses all nuance. This is not a monolithic, homogenous category. Not all women experience life, and systems, in the same way. Multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage and oppression.
- Challenging and transformative in my focus and approach. Very important we consider structure and gender and how the two intersect and interact



# YOU CAN'T HIDE THE HOMELESS



- 2016: 'counts' disaggregated by sex. Women in the minority – prevailing viewpoint
- Two key issues: **Enumeration** and **Conception**: traditionally a 'masculinist' concept? Applying a 'hierarchy of extremity'?
- How women 'sleep rough' – just as brutalising, dangerous, and damaging?
- 'We don't know enough about the needs of women' (Rough Sleeping Strategy, 2018). If government homelessness policy and funding continues to focus its attention on a narrow definition of 'rough sleeping', does all 'evidence' and reporting merely continue to obscure?
- Current intense policy focus on visible homelessness / 'rough sleeping' – more opportunity / imperative to interrogate how this affects women? COVID -19, Everyone In. LGA report and Kerslake Review confirms what many 'in the field' knew? Path dependence?
- Equality and equity in provision is not a zero-sum game – visible rough sleeping is important and rightly prioritised, but this is about increasing our understanding, and adapting our practices

## What do we know (about what we don't know?)

- Research and practice evidence – small base but relatively consistent (often based on ‘who you see’) convenience sampling?
- Greater reliance on ‘informal’ networks, avoidance of ‘mainstream’ services?
- Risk, safety and harm is gendered – women seek out less ‘visible’ spaces? (1/3 of 20 case studies in my previous work had been raped or violently sexually assaulted)
- Movement through space is gendered – more likely to be constantly ‘on the move’ – not static in or ‘known’ spaces? Women ‘covering a lot of ground’ This goes against women’s ‘usual’ trajectory into adulthood? Geography ‘narrows’ as a woman.
- Interactions can be time-limited, sporadic, ‘opportunistic’
- Exploitation, ‘survival’ spaces / accommodation? ‘Sofa surfing’ – an erroneously quaint term
- Briefer periods of ‘visibility’ interspersed with inappropriate (and retraumatizing?) accommodation

# What do we know (or not know?)

- **Motherhood**
- Mental health issues – evidence we have says higher prevalence in women
- Sex work / ‘survival sex’
- **Lack of trust and faith in services – longevity of approach**
- **Stigma and shame – assumptions on how women behave – norms and values**
- Mixed sex accommodation – avoidance, ‘re-traumatisation’
- **‘Non-specialist’ forms of female only accommodation: sex disaggregation is not enough**
- Couples or partnerships
- Strong crossover with ‘multiple disadvantage’/‘complex needs’? ‘Hard Edges’ vs ‘Gender Matters’

## What do we know (or not know?)

- Violence, trauma and abuse – ‘near universal’. Bi-directional relationships
- A tendency to focus on ‘needs’ - are needs a visible manifestation of structure, society, and systems? Womanhood is a structural position not a support need! Intersectional approaches.
- Do we devalue responses that incorporate personal, cultural, social and structural dimensions and their complex intersections? Hard to translate into practice? We can’t ‘solve’ the ‘problem’ by ‘fixing’ the person.
- Women have to ‘fit’ or change – the onus should be on us to change our services and practices
- Narrativising trauma? ‘Speaking out’ is a foundational principle of women’s movements – is there a more inclusive alternative?

## Do we Compartmentalise and Personalise Trauma?

- ‘Safety’, ‘harm’, ‘risk’ and ‘abuse’ – can become interchangeable and fixed ideas in homelessness practice.
- Most often viewed as interpersonal violence or ‘domestic abuse where a woman has to leave’.
- Historical, intersecting, structural, systemic and social harms and ‘violence’. The continuum of harm / the ‘ordinariness’ in women’s lives. Racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ableism....
- Some women reject labels like ‘refuge’ and ‘domestic abuse’ and are not ready / do not want to take any action
- These concepts are gendered, personalised and context-bound – not all women ‘fit’
- My emerging work on how women are treated in homeless-type accommodation – stereotypical notions of how women behave and the consequences for not conforming?
- 67% women are ‘too complex’ to manage. Sexual disinhibition – considered a behaviour when it is a response. Exploitative behaviour, ‘cuckooing’, ‘sex work’ - the woman had to leave (‘balancing harm in household’)
- Choice, autonomy and control – lest our services become another form of coercion and harm

## Lack of gendered response in design and funding?

- **Safety** must be a consistent feature across all services and interventions – psychosocial and intersectional, not just interpersonal and spatial
- We are missing women who need our help by focusing on counts and consistent, visible ‘street-based activity’ – government-funded programme ‘outcomes’ guiding focus and practice?
- Focus too heavily on the tangible ‘outcomes’ at the expense of longevity and recovery
- Long term funding with flexible ‘outcomes’. Qualitative and experiential data over statistical and unrealistic ‘outcomes’
- Competitive and fragmented tendering damages collectivity of response
- Further cyclical experiences of homelessness, trauma and abuse - women become the ‘hardest to help’
- Consistency and collectivity across the country – funding under jointly understood principles
- “We don’t know enough about women’s homelessness and rough sleeping” – fund us to find out!

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