

Women's journeys in response to domestic violence

Initial findings
March 2012

Introduction

The main aim of the research project is to improve understanding of the extent and the implications of the journeys women make to escape domestic violence in the UK. Using large administrative datasets the research enables the identification, quantification and mapping of over 18,000 journeys per year by women to access services in England.

Key points

- Tens of thousands of women and children relocate due to domestic violence in a distinctive process of forced internal migration in the UK.
- Women leave everywhere and go everywhere they can, leading to an overall process of spatial churn at the national scale with no strong net flows.
- What may be very significant journeys for individuals do not, therefore, aggregate to a significant net displacement at the regional or national scale.
- Women were aged from 15 to 88, with or without children, and from a range of backgrounds; however, demographic characteristics gave little indication of how far women had moved.
- There was a high level of residential mobility within Local Authorities, and many relatively short journeys to other Local Authorities, suggesting that if women could stay relatively local they did.
- Demographic characteristics gave little indication of whether or not women moved to another Local Authority; however crossing such boundaries can have significant implications for housing and other rights.
- Most Local Authorities had similar numbers of women arriving and leaving due to domestic violence each year, leading to a low net rate of arriving/leaving per Local Authority.
- Women tended to go to similar types of Local Authority as the one they left, therefore the Local Authorities with higher rates of women leaving also tended to have higher rates of women arriving.

- Women have been dependent on this informal reciprocity between Local Authorities; however this is not recognised in the current funding of services such as women's refuges and there is no formal national overview or policy of service location or capacity.
- The Localism agenda could further focus Local Authorities away from the needs of their local women who are forced to move away due to domestic violence; and a comprehensive national picture will no longer be available with the end of central coordination of the Supporting People programme.

Research background

In a context of shifting central/local government relationships, and debates over the provision and capacity of domestic violence services, the actual journeys women make to access such services have been under-recognised. Despite some recognition that domestic violence forces women and children to relocate for safety, domestic violence services have been regarded as a local government responsibility; with a consequent uneven provision across the country. Whilst the Supporting People Programme enabled increased provision of support as well as accommodation services in some areas, and recognised the need for cross-authority arrangements for women at risk of domestic violence, central coordination of this programme has now ended. The associated England-wide evidence base was used by some local authorities to inform their service funding decisions, but there has been limited use of the data to enable a national picture of how and where women accessed services. This research uses analysis of those administrative data for England (2003-09) to achieve a more comprehensive picture of the relocation of women at the local and national level.

Internal Migration

Women's journeys to escape domestic violence are conceptualised as migration journeys because they are journeys with a sufficient degree of permanence of leaving to be a relocation of residence. When such journeys cross a local authority boundary they are defined as internal migration; when they are within a local authority they are defined as residential mobility. Forced

relocation (such as in response to the risk of domestic violence) creates Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within a nation state; highlighting governmental responsibilities for meeting IDPs' protection needs under the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

The United Kingdom is not typically seen as a country of Internally Displaced Persons; however this research identifies that tens of thousands of women and children are in this situation every year.

Demographic characteristics

The research is on women's journeys because such relocation to escape domestic violence is highly gendered. In 2009-10, of all people accessing any type of Supporting People support service due to domestic violence (n=26,883) only 1.6 per cent (n=434) were male.

The research is not a comprehensive consideration of women's experiences or responses: not all women who experience domestic violence access formal support services; and of those who do, not all relocate. However, the Supporting People data enable analysis of the characteristics of those women who do relocate and access housing-related services due to domestic violence.

In 2008-09, the 18,812 women who relocated were aged from 15 to 88 and over half (53.9%) had children with them (18,819 children aged under 18). They came from all ethnic origins (according to the census categories) and 67.4% were White British. Most had no additional recorded needs beyond the domestic violence, but 8.2% were disabled and some had additional needs around mental health (3.7%), alcohol (1.2%) or other drugs (0.9%).

Different women's journeys

Women travelled from all 354 English Local Authorities, from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and abroad to access support services in England. In 2008-09 18,812 women (with 18,819 children) travelled over 380,000 miles in total.

Distances were calculated by mapping the origin and destination Local Authority for each woman, and are therefore estimations, as exact location within the Local Authority is confidential, and the routes travelled are not recorded. Conservative estimation techniques ensured that distances would tend to under-estimation. Whilst there was a wide range of distances travelled, and a wide range of demographic characteristics of women, there was limited statistically significant association between women's characteristics and the distances travelled.

There was no statistically significant association between broad categories of ethnic origin (White, Black, Asian, Mixed, Chinese and other) and how far women moved. Age was a small factor, with

women under 23 and over 43 travelling slightly less far than women aged 23-42. Disabled women tended to travel slightly less far than Non-disabled women, as did women with additional needs around mental health, alcohol or other drugs in comparison with women without such additional needs. In contrast, women with children tended to travel slightly further than women without children. Overall, however, very little of the difference in distances travelled (from short journeys within a Local Authority to over 400 miles from Scotland to Southern England) was significantly associated with any demographic characteristics of the women.

Crossing Local Authority boundaries

Whilst Local Authority boundaries may carry little significance for women at the time of escaping domestic violence, they can have longer term importance in terms of housing rights and access to support services and statutory services such as health and schools.

However, again, demographic characteristics give little indication of whether or not women migrated to a different Local Authority when they relocated. White British women were slightly more likely to relocate within a Local Authority than Ethnic Minority women; but were likely to travel further than Ethnic Minority women if they did migrate to another Local Authority. Similarly, Disabled women were slightly more likely to relocate within a Local Authority; but likely to travel further than Non-disabled women if they did migrate to another Local Authority. Differences in terms of women's ages were very small, with only under 18s clearly more likely to stay within a Local Authority, and 28-32 year olds more likely to migrate to another Local Authority. Women with children were slightly more likely to migrate to another Local Authority than those without children.

The types of journeys

Because of the limited association of women's demographic characteristics with journey distances and/or whether or not they crossed Local Authority boundaries, it is appropriate to generalise about the journeys.

Most journeys were relatively short distances, with 45.6% being journeys of residential mobility within the same Local Authority. In addition, half of the migration journeys to other Local Authorities were less than 18 miles. However, some women travelled long distances - over 300 miles within England and further from Scotland; and the average migration journey to another Local Authority was 36.7 miles.

The individual journeys were in all directions across the country, from every English Local Authority; and arriving in most Local Authorities (some Local Authorities do not have services that women could relocate to). Most origin-destination

journeys were unique in each year: in 2008-09, nearly two-thirds of journeys (65.9%) were travelled by just one woman in a year; and 81.8% were travelled by only one or two women.

The types of Local Authorities

Local Authorities with services that women escaping domestic violence could relocate to may already be aware of the numbers of non-local women who arrive in their services each year. However, this research also quantifies for each English Local Authority the number of their local women who migrated to services elsewhere because of domestic violence. The numbers of women arriving and leaving, as well as the numbers of women relocating within each Local Authority, were converted to proportions per 10,000 female (age 15+) population, to allow for population differences between Local Authorities.

A significant finding is that most Local Authorities had similar numbers of women arriving and leaving each year. This is indicated by a net leaving/arriving rate of between ± 3 women per 10,000 female population for around 60% of English Local Authorities.

So whilst women left more deprived Local Authorities (Indices of Multiple Deprivation Average Score) in higher proportion than from less deprived areas, they also arrived in higher proportions to more deprived areas. In contrast, women left and arrived in lower proportions from and to more rural Local Authorities (Rural-Urban Classification); and left and arrived in lower proportions from and to Local Authorities with fewer domestic violence services. The tendency for these numbers arriving and leaving to be similar is confirmed by there being no statistically significant correlation between net arriving/leaving and Local Authority characteristics of deprivation, rural-urban classification, geographical size, number of domestic violence services or type of local authority (Area Group Classification).

Spatial churn

Analysing the types of Local Authority that women left due to domestic violence, and the types that they arrived in to access services, it is clear that the migration tended to be to similar types of Local Authority as the one left. Whilst women were relocating in order to change their personal circumstances of being at risk of domestic violence, they tended not to be changing their external circumstances of type of area so strikingly.

Women from more rural Local Authorities were statistically significantly more likely to have migrated to other rural Local Authorities; and women from more urban Local Authorities to other urban Local Authorities. Using the Area Group Classification of Local Authorities (which uses a range of demographic and socio-economic

variables to group similar local authorities); there is again a statistically significant association of women having migrated to Local Authorities of the same type as the one they left.

Overall, therefore, a process of spatial churn is identified across the country, with the thousands of individual journeys tending to cancel each other out on the national scale. Women migrated from all areas, and tended to arrive in similar numbers in each Local Authority as the number of women who left to access services elsewhere. Women tended to journey to similar types of Local Authority as the one they left, so there were none of the net trends associated with other internal migration, such as North to South, Urban to Rural or into or out of London. Whilst tens of thousands of women and children are forced to migrate due to domestic violence within the UK every year, it is a migration that does not look like a migration because it is not a net migration on the regional or national scale.

Conclusions

Contrary to an emphasis in public debate on local responses to domestic violence, the evidence from this research is that there is little that is distinctively local about relocation due to domestic violence. Many agencies and authorities have developed policies and services to improve how they respond to domestic violence in their local areas; however, there has been less recognition of the implications of domestic violence such that women are forced to move away from their local area.

This research identifies that over 18,000 journeys were made each year by women at risk of domestic violence, from relatively short journeys within a Local Authority to nearly 10,000 which crossed Local Authority boundaries. Women travelled from everywhere, and how far they went showed little significant difference associated with their age, ethnic origin, disability or whether or not they had children; but the journeys tended to be to similar types of Local Authority to the one they left.

Overall, this forced migration indicates a process of spatial churn across the country, with no strong net flows, and most Local Authorities experienced similar numbers of women arriving and leaving due to domestic violence each year.

Policy implications

These research findings on the extent and nature of women's journeys to escape domestic violence raise important questions for local and national policies and governmental responsibilities at the local and national scales.

Firstly, they question the current funding arrangements, capacity and location of domestic violence support services in the UK.

Domestic violence services tend to be a local funding responsibility, despite the recognition that accommodation services (particularly women's refuges) tend to be accessed by a majority of non-local women. This research quantifies the informal unplanned reciprocity between Local Authorities: that most only provide services to non-local women in a similar proportion to the extent to which they benefit from other Local Authorities providing services to their local women.

However, this national reciprocity is not recognised in current funding arrangements, and the Localism agenda places increased emphasis on Local Authorities to focus only on meeting the needs of local people. This risks Local Authorities neglecting the needs both of their local women who have to cross boundaries to escape domestic violence, and of non-local women who arrive seeking safety.

The Local Authority responsibility for women's refuges also determines the location and capacity of services, with some Local Authorities funding no provision. This research indicates that women need to seek help from all Local Authorities, and are not relocating to any particular type of Local Authority in greater proportion; or with any strong net flow. This would imply the need for a national overview of provision, and policies to ensure appropriate service locations and capacity, to enable women and their children to escape as far as they need to, but no further, and to be able to go to the type of place that meets their needs for resettlement.

Secondly, the findings highlight the implications for women of crossing Local Authority boundaries in terms of their housing tenure rights, and their access to service support.

Women leave their Local Authority because they are forced to; and the large number of short migration journeys and journeys of residential mobility within a Local Authority suggests that if women can stay local they tend to do so. It should not necessarily follow from that initial force from the perpetrator that they should also be forced to lose their housing tenure rights, and their service support, because of crossing an administrative boundary.

However, a more seamless provision would require greater cooperation between local authorities, and a more robust national overview and policies on service location, capacity and access criteria. Such a national responsibility can also be argued for in terms of a governmental responsibility to protect the rights and provide protection for women who are forced to migrate: as Internally Displaced Persons.

About the project

The research is being carried out by Janet Bowstead, funded by an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Studentship.

The quantitative and mapping analysis of administrative datasets from 2003-09 is part of a mixed methods approach which also includes qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 20 women about their experiences in seeking safety, creative groupwork with women, and interviews with experts in domestic violence services. The whole research project is due to be completed in early 2013.

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Further information

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