

# The Crisis in Rape Crisis

Understanding and supporting  
women and their organisations



# Key findings

Thirty-five of the 38 Rape Crisis (England and Wales) affiliated members responded to an in-depth survey. These are the key findings from this research.

## **Rape Crisis is a crucial support service for women with historic experiences of sexual violence (such as childhood sexual abuse).**

Sixty-one per cent of survivors who were supported by Rape Crisis centres had sexual violence experiences which happened three or more years ago. In addition, 85% of women were identified as having 'complex needs'. On average, just 10% of survivors reported the experience/s to the police.

Respondents and service user evaluations reported that the positive effects of accessing Rape Crisis centres impact, not just on survivors, but also their loved ones and wider communities. Survivors reported outcomes ranging from improved mental well being and a reduction in self-harming, better inter-personal relationships, ability to return to work or study, ability to reduce or stop medication, etc.

The 35 Rape Crisis centres that responded to the survey had a combined annual income of £3,570,912 in 2006-07. In 2004-05, the Government spent more than twice this amount on advertising and public relations *each week*. Sixty-three per cent of Rape Crisis centres had an annual income of £100,000 or less. The average income was £81,598, only marginally more than the cost, to the state, of one rape. Funding to some of the larger Sexual Assault Referral Centres is five times this average income. The average income of centres in the North West, South East and East of England was significantly lower than in other English regions and Wales.

Securing funding was a relentless and constant challenge; often resulting in low staff morale and/or, in worst case scenarios, the 'freezing' or closure of services (resulting in survivors not receiving the support they need). In addition, 15 centres had been challenged by funders about being women-only.

Grant funding received in 2006-07 was examined in-depth. There were 161 grants reported, ranging in value from £200 to £202,000. The total value of this funding was £2,762,627, and the average grant was just £8,650. Thirty-two per cent of this funding came from councils and partnerships, 26% from the Home Office and 23% from charitable grant givers. However, where the funding came from did not reflect where centres were applying to. For example, over half of all centres applied to a local or regional public body (other than councils), yet only eight received any funding.

Of the 161 grants, 22 were Service Level Agreements (SLAs). Almost one third of these SLAs were for three or more years, compared with just ten per cent of all grants.

Given the low value of the average grant funding received, it was not surprising that Rape Crisis centres submitted a disproportionate number of applications compared with the funding received. For example, one organisation received just £77,000 (in total) from 14 funders.

Many centres stated that they felt compelled to keep costs low in funding applications, such as costing salaries well below the market value, in order to improve their chances of receiving any funding.

## **Seventy-nine per cent of grants were for one year or less.**

## **Sixty-nine per cent of centres said they were ‘unsustainable’ in the future.**

### **Eight organisations had no funding secured for 2008-09.**

There are few Rape Crisis centres, relative to the large populations they service, and they often cover vast geographical areas across England and Wales. Recent research by End Violence Against Women has found that all areas are vastly under-served.

There were 43 full-time and 103 part-time paid staff and 12 full-time and 684 part-time volunteers working for Rape Crisis centres. Eight organisations have made posts redundant or have reduced staff hours due to lack of funding. There were instances in six organisations where staff had worked *without pay* because of a funding crisis. Staff commitment to the well-being of survivors, through the continuation of a quality service even though salaries could no longer be paid, was extremely high.

A total of 498 services were delivered, ranging from two to 20 different services per organisation. On average, a centre delivered 14 types of services. Face-to-face counselling and telephone helplines were the most common types of services delivered.

### **Only 21% of services were fully-funded.**

There were 134,242 direct contacts (including counselling and support sessions, helpline calls, referrals and advice/enquiries etc) with survivors, their families and friends and other agencies in the last 12 months.

The data indicated that there was a strong relationship between annual income and levels and types of services delivered. Although only 37% of Rape Crisis centres had an annual income of £100,000 or more, these 13 organisations accounted for:

- 68% of paid staff;
- 68% of all counselling appointments;
- 70% of all helpline calls;
- 61% of all contacts with other organisations; and
- 74% of service users.

The two organisations with an annual income of £300,000 or more saw one third of all service users and provided almost a third of all service outputs. In addition, these 13 centres were far more likely to negotiate multi-year SLAs of greater value.

Nineteen centres stated that they have no restrictions on the length of time that survivors can access support (such as counselling). Of the 14 centres that do have time limits in place, the length of support ranged from four months to two years, with an average of one year.

Twenty-five organisations had a total of 510 women on waiting lists. The average length of time a survivor spent on a waiting list was 84 days or roughly three months.

### **The total number of average days on waiting lists was 1,929 days – equivalent to 5.3 years.**

Despite the many positive benefits reported by Rape Crisis centres, organisations felt there were low levels of awareness about the work of Rape Crisis, both amongst the general public and Government decision makers.

# Conclusions

## Strengths of the Rape Crisis sector

Despite being spectacularly under-funded, Rape Crisis centres provide professional support which makes a significant impact on the lives of survivors. Because there are few Rape Crisis centres, they cover wide geographical areas, often supporting women (and men) within a hundred mile radius.

Rape Crisis centre staff and volunteers hold a large number of relevant qualifications and often have decades of combined experience working in this field. They provide high quality specialist support which enables women to address the impact abuse has on their lives and challenge the myths that blame women for sexual violence. The National Service and Occupational Standards currently being developed in partnership with other organisations will provide guidance on the qualifications and skills needed to work in a Rape Crisis Centre. The level of commitment made by staff and volunteers to keep services running during times of financial crises is extremely high, albeit at a personal cost to workers.

Rape Crisis centres produce an astonishing amount of service outputs (counselling appointments, helpline calls and advocacy sessions), particularly given their high reliance on volunteers and the lack of funding received. They also support other agencies, engage in Government consultations, undertake prevention work, and provide expertise to and take referrals from health and other statutory bodies. There was strong evidence that centres with annual incomes over £100,000 delivered greater outputs and supported more service users *because* they were better funded and had more paid staff than organisations with an income of £100,000 or less. The two centres that were best funded (over £300,000 per annum) were responsible for a third of all contacts with service users.

Many survivors would not access centres if they were not women-only. Women-only and women-led services provide safe spaces for survivors of sexual violence to address their experiences.

Rape Crisis centres primarily support women and girls who: have experienced historic sexual violence (including adult survivors of childhood sexual assault); have complex needs; and who do not report their assault to the police. Many have never told their experiences to anyone before, or accessed any other support.<sup>52</sup> Rape Crisis centres are user-led and most support women for as long as needed, sometimes over a number of years. Rape Crisis centres support a relatively large number of women, particularly those centres with annual incomes over £100,000.

## Challenges facing the Rape Crisis sector

All regions in England and Wales are vastly under-served. Most women do not have access to a Rape Crisis centre and access to support is a postcode lottery.<sup>53</sup> There are few Rape Crisis centres relative to the large populations they cover, and centres are often responsible for vast geographical areas.

Funding to the Rape crisis sector is spectacularly low. The 35 Rape Crisis centres that responded to the survey had a combined annual income of £3,570,912 in 2006-07. In 2004-05, the Government spent more than twice this amount on advertising and public relations *each week*.<sup>54</sup> More than six

<sup>52</sup> Rape Crisis (England and Wales) 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Coy, M. et al. (2007).

<sup>54</sup> Government 'spin' spending unnecessary. Taken from the Liberal Democrats website: [www.libdems.org.uk/news/story.html?id=9605](http://www.libdems.org.uk/news/story.html?id=9605).

times this amount was spent on imprisoning rapists than is spent on funding for Rape Crisis centres.<sup>55</sup> While it is crucial that perpetrators are brought to justice, there must be as much commitment to ensuring support services for survivors of sexual violence.

Sixty-three per cent of Rape Crisis centres had an annual income of £100,000 or less. The average income of a centre was £81,598, only marginally more than the cost, to the state, of *one rape*.<sup>56</sup> Funding to some of the larger Sexual Assault Referral Centres is five times this average income.<sup>57</sup>

Funding is short-term and unsustainable, with 79% of grants being for one year or less. Accessing funding takes large amounts of time and energy for centres, particularly when they are already stretched to capacity. Funding difficulties (including delays in hearing about or receiving funding) have significant impacts on staff and service users, such as when services are closed or reduced.

Many of the services provided are not fully funded, or even partly funded. Smaller centres are not able to provide as many service outputs or see as many women as better funded centres. Lack of stable funding has impacted upon centres' ability to provide services, including a centre's capacity to implement the range of services needed. Twenty-three per cent of Rape Crisis centres had not secured funding for 2008-09.

Rape Crisis centres operate with very small numbers of paid staff and rely heavily on volunteers, yet demand for their work is high. Over-reliance on volunteers is not sustainable, particularly when combined with significant resource restraints.

While women-only services are effective and wanted, they are being challenged by a range of statutory agencies. Some centres had funding refused on the basis of being women-only or had been pressured to deliver services to men.

There is a large demand for Rape Crisis services and long waiting lists as a result. Often, significant resources are needed to effectively support a survivor of sexual violence (as the impacts can be long-lasting and severe) and they may need to access support for some time. This does not seem to be fully acknowledged or understood by Government.

Most Rape Crisis centres thought that both the public and the Government were unaware of the work of Rape Crisis, or even the extent or impact of sexual violence against women and girls. Despite the significant awareness that has been raised about 'the crisis in Rape Crisis', this has yet to result in the political will (urgently) needed to ensure that sexual violence survivors are able to access independent, sustainable, specialist, women-only support services such as Rape Crisis centres and put an end to the postcode lottery.

<sup>55</sup> The gross cost of a prison place in the UK was £37,500. Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (1998) *Reducing offending: an assessment of research evidence on ways of dealing with offending behaviour*. Home Office Research Study 187. Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office: London. There were 728 convicted rapists imprisoned in 2005. Research, Development and Statistics Directorate and Office for Criminal Justice Reform (2006) *Criminal Statistics 2005 England and Wales*. Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office: London.

<sup>56</sup> The estimated cost to the state of one rape is £73,487. Research Development and Statistics Directorate (2005) *The economic and social costs of crime against individuals and households 2003/04*. Online report 30/05. Research Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office: London.

<sup>57</sup> The funding for the three SARC in London was £1.2m and St Mary's in Manchester was £500,000. Domestic Violence Coordinators' Forum meeting notes. 02/03/2006. Taken from Government Offices for the English Regions website: [www.gos.gov.uk/497648/docs/300069/DVforumMarch06](http://www.gos.gov.uk/497648/docs/300069/DVforumMarch06).

# Recommendations

**Support for women and girls to rebuild their lives after rape must be a right, not a privilege determined by a postcode lottery.**

## Funding

**The inequality between Rape Crisis and other nation-wide services providing support to victims of other types of crime must be eliminated.**

Following the Scottish model, a cross-Government ring-fenced 'Rape Crisis Fund' of £5m needs to be established before the end of 2008. This should include money from the Department of Health.

Rape Crisis centres provide essential services to survivors of sexual violence, and are integral to successful SARCs. Both Rape Crisis centres and SARCs need to be appropriately and adequately resourced.

To improve the quality and consistency of services, grants and SLAs of one year or less should be avoided. Three-year cycles for grants and SLAs should become the norm not the exception.

Statutory agencies making referrals to Rape Crisis need to invest in those services.

Charitable trusts should acknowledge that Rape Crisis centres are at crisis point and consider re/opening specific streams for rape and other forms of sexual violence.

All funders to take proactive steps to outlaw the 'hand to mouth' existence experienced by many Rape Crisis centres. Funders who delay decisions because of their own disorganisation should accept responsibility for the impact this has on the sustainability of services.

A realistic, Compact compliant funding base for the national umbrella group Rape Crisis (England and Wales) needs to be implemented as a matter of urgency, and should follow the Scottish Model.

## Staffing

**Funding needs to be made available for salaries and on-costs. Higher levels of paid staff are required to deliver services, train and supervise volunteers and manage Rape Crisis centres.**

The professionalism of Rape Crisis staff and volunteers should be recognised.

Staff and volunteers should be commended for their commitment to providing services in times of financial crisis and their personal expense should be acknowledged and, where possible, recompensed.

There needs to be more awareness that reducing levels of paid staff has a direct effect on the number and quality of volunteers a centre can support, and the number of service users that can be supported.

A proper commitment to full-cost recovery is needed. Salaries should be able to be paid at the market rate relative to skills and experience, and be increased with inflation.

Funding needs to be made available to implement national service standards for Rape Crisis centre workers.

### **Service provision**

**Every woman and girl should have access to a Rape Crisis centre. This means increasing the number and capacity of Rape Crisis centres.**

Increased service provision for survivors should be achieved through increased funding.

The Government acknowledges that sexual violence is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality, yet there is a gap between policy and practice that needs to be closed as a matter of urgency. The support needs of survivors of sexual violence must be prioritised by Government through supporting and sustaining appropriate services.

The large amounts of consultative work undertaken by Rape Crisis centres should be recompensed accordingly.

### **Women-only**

**There must be greater recognition of the importance, and protection of, women-only space for survivors of sexual violence.**

Statutory sector funders should respect a survivor's right to choose a women-only space and refrain from supporting and commissioning only generic service provision.

A cross-government 'Violence Against Women Strategy' should be in place by March 2009, and should include a strong commitment to sexual violence survivors and practical actions to improve funding to Rape Crisis centres.

### **Service users**

**The impact of sexual violence is long term and far reaching. Survivors need access to long term counselling and support.**

Since most service users were defined as having 'complex needs' which were often not being met by statutory services, a more diverse range of funding is needed (health, education, employment etc.).

The Department of Health needs to recognise that the closure of Rape Crisis centres has a direct impact on the numbers of women they provide care for, because of the serious health consequences of sexual violence.

Waiting times should be eliminated – all women should have immediate access to services.

### **Awareness of Rape Crisis centres**

**Rape Crisis centres should be funded to carry out a public awareness campaign about the reality and impact of sexual violence.**

The Inter-Ministerial Group on Sexual Violence Work needs to learn about and promote the value and sustainability of the Rape Crisis sector.

A national training programme on sexual violence awareness should be resourced and rolled out by Rape Crisis to all statutory sector services that have contact with survivors of sexual violence. This should be at a local, regional and national level, and should use a woman centred, empowerment model.

# Acknowledgements

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'The Crisis in Rape Crisis' has been researched and written by Darlene Corry, Tania Pouwhare and Macarena Vergara, with assistance from Angie Conroy, Lee Eggleston and Sheila Coates.

The report was designed by Iris Wilkes.

## **Women's Resource Centre**

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) is a charity which supports women's organisations to be more effective and sustainable. We provide training, information, resources and one-to-one support on a range of organisational development issues. We also lobby decision makers on behalf of the women's not-for-profit sector for improved representation and funding.

Our members work in a wide range of fields including violence against women, employment, education, rights and equality, the criminal justice system and the environment. They deliver services to and campaign on behalf of some of the most marginalised communities of women.

There are over ten thousand people working or volunteering for our members who support almost half a million individuals each year.

**[www.wrc.org.uk](http://www.wrc.org.uk)**

## **Rape Crisis (England and Wales)**

Rape Crisis (England and Wales) was set up and registered as a charity to support the work of Rape Crisis centres in England and Wales.

It provides co-ordination and support to 38 affiliated member groups and campaigns and lobbies to raise awareness of the issues of sexual violence in the wider community and with local and national government.

**[www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)**