

# GM4WOMEN2028

## SAFETY GROUP BRIEFING NOTE 2022

Given the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021, we have an opportunity to use our collective voice to demand better support for the safety of women and girls across Greater Manchester.

**Hence, the *Safety Group* aims to draw on and extend the power of women's voices to shape action and improvements in responses to women who face and survive violence and harm.**

The two 'Safety' measures on the GM4Women2028 scorecard (<https://www.gm4women2028.org/>, @GM4Women2028) are:

- 56% of female survivors of gender sexual-based violence in GM did not access support in relation to what happened to them.
- 99% of women survivors with no recourse to public funds have been refused access to a refuge because of their immigration status.

*Building the evidence to call for action...*

We were able to draw from two local one-off research projects: the VOSGM 'Voices of Survivors project'<sup>1</sup> and the Safety4Sisters 'Migrant Women's Rights to Safety Pilot Project'<sup>2</sup>. The two scorecard measures derive directly from the reports that centre on the experiences of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Note that 'Safety' indicator 3 has remained the same since 2019, and indicator 4 has only slightly changed, reflecting the lack of available GM-wide data on any issue of women's experiences of violence and lack of safety. This lack of annual GM-wide data is telling, and the below call to action for consultation will include the urgent need for better data.

The Domestic Abuse Safeguarding during Covid-19 (DASC) study, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), as part of UK Research and Innovation's rapid response to Covid-19 and led by Prof. Khatidja Chantler, MMU is hosting its end of project conference on March 1st, 9.30- 1 p.m. (online). You can register at:

[www.eventbrite.com/e/domestic-abuse-safeguarding-during-covid-19-challenges-and-opportunities-tickets-244385281957](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/domestic-abuse-safeguarding-during-covid-19-challenges-and-opportunities-tickets-244385281957)



<sup>1</sup> VOSGM (2018) Voices of Survivors. Report available here: <http://vosgm.org.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> Safety for Sisters (2016) Migrant Women's Rights to Safety Pilot Project. Report available here: <https://www.safety4sisters.org/about>

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The study sought to identify key changes to multi-agency safeguarding arrangements during the pandemic and the impact of such changes on strategic leads, practitioners and survivors, with a particular focus on Black and minoritized survivors. Key findings from the qualitative aspect of the study found that:

- Domestic abuse referrals were reduced in the initial lockdown with an increase in volume and complexity of cases once national and local messaging was clear that there was support for victim-survivors of domestic abuse.
- Increased complexity included heightened mental health needs, no recourse to public funds (NRPF); a lack of understanding of non-intimate partner domestic abuse; substance use.
- Opportunities for safeguarding were reduced, particularly for children due to school closures.
- Vicarious trauma was heightened due to working from home, and practitioners missed informal contact with colleagues. However, many organisations offered additional support and supervision.
- The move to digital working was seen as positive in many ways with greater attendances at multi-agency meetings; practitioners valued the flexibility of home working, but some commented on the loss of transitory spaces (e.g. the commute to/from work) to ground themselves before returning home.
- Digital poverty and lack of technical know-how excluded some of the most vulnerable women from accessing services.
- Survivors found it difficult to access services for various reasons, particularly those with NRPF – where Covid-19 related risks increased during the pandemic.

Further details about the study and its outputs (including recommendations) will be added to our study website: <https://domesticabuse-safeguarding-covid19.co.uk/>

**Key Action:** We are inviting local women and organisations to highlight a ‘statistic of concern’ throughout 2022, and call on GM leaders to collect and publish reliable data on safety strategies.

*Moving to action...*

**Key Action 2022:** The Safety group calls on GM leaders to take action to:

1. Ensure the safety of women and girls is designed in the planning and operation of all streets, public spaces, and parks across Greater Manchester.
2. Prioritise and implement policy actions focused on supporting rape victims and women with no recourse to public funds experiencing domestic abuse.



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Evidence<sup>3</sup> from a Manchester-based qualitative study among migrant women with lived experience of domestic violence underscored the importance of collaborative working between all stakeholders to ensure migrant women with no recourse to public funds can access the services they need. Thus, we are keen to work with various groups, including grassroots and community groups, faith-based organisations, advocacy and delivery organisations in the women's sector and statutory partners.

We are actively seeking local women and specialist groups and organisations to promote these 'Safety' concerns. We invite individual women and representatives from local groups and organisations to join the GM Scorecard 'Safety' group. Together, we can collectively engage in campaigning and shape local policy, practice, and influence the commissioning of services for survivors of gender-based violence.

For the group to effectively represent the diverse experiences of survivors of gender-based violence, we need expertise and knowledge representing a wide range of issues and communities. For example, those working with women experiencing sexual violence, domestic violence, immigration appeals, poor mental health, criminalisation and imprisonment, sex work. And from a range of positions that require an active understanding and specific response, whether concerning racialisation, sexuality and/ or disability.

The group will offer a space of solidarity where we can understand the priorities in local issues of women's safety. We can collectively demand investment and overcome the current barriers to improving support for women who experience gender-based violence.

Our focus will be to ensure action that creates a positive impact in the lives of women who experience sexual and gender-based violence. Join us to ensure women's voices are heard, and change happens in Greater Manchester.




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<sup>3</sup> Femi-Ajao, O. (2018) Intimate partner violence and abuse against Nigerian women resident in England, UK: a cross-sectional qualitative study. BMC Women's Health DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-018-0610-4>

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