



CHANGING LIVES



SECURING SAFE FUTURES AND FREEDOM



Experiences of Accessing Housing for Women Facing Adult Sexual Exploitation

A Briefing from the STAGE Project
October 2023



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Executive Summary

This briefing on access to housing for women experiencing sexual exploitation is based on learning from STAGE, a partnership supported by the National Lottery Community Fund that seeks to explore and highlight the nature and extent of sexual exploitation of adult women across our communities.

STAGE brings together charities Changing Lives, The Angelou Centre, Ashiana, GROW, A Way Out, Together Women, Basis Yorkshire and WomenCentre to provide trauma-informed support for women who have been groomed for sexual exploitation across the North East and Yorkshire. STAGE has supported over 500 women and aims to share the learning from their experiences to create systemic change.

Women who have experienced sexual exploitation are often targeted due to their housing status yet face multiple barriers to housing. This briefing details their experiences and makes recommendations for change.

Key findings
The current cost of living has made it more difficult for women to escape exploitative situations and live independently which, in some cases, has caused women to return to their abusers. Benefit rates are not high enough to live on and Local Housing Allowance does not always cover women’s rents, having been frozen since April 2020, leaving women in rent arrears.
Support such as foodbanks and the government’s cost of living payments in 2022-23 only address acute short-term need and not long-term deprivation. Women are instead having to turn to loan sharks, abusers or survival sex in order to make ends meet.
Women experiencing sexual exploitation are more at risk of hidden homelessness such as sofa surfing and often enter ‘sex for rent’ arrangements where accommodation is provided in exchange for sexual services. For women with multiple unmet needs such arrangements can be highly exploitative and there is not enough regulation of landlords in England to address this.
The solution to this form of sexual exploitation is not just to target perpetrators but to address women’s vulnerabilities. Until issues in our housing and homelessness systems are addressed, women will continue to be vulnerable to having their housing needs exploited.

The distinction between consensual sex work, survival sex and sexual exploitation is not always clear, therefore specialist services who support women in all of these scenarios play an important role in identifying the type of support that women need.

Women are often blocked from mainstream refuge accommodation due to be labelled 'too high risk' or 'too complex'. The very factors that make them vulnerable to exploitation, such as drug dependency, are used as reasons to deny them support. They are instead often housed in hostels, including mixed-sex hostels, where they are unable to access the specialist trauma-informed support that they need.

Women have been evicted from supported accommodation for reasons which should be seen as an indicator of exploitation, such as spending several nights in a different location.

Women receiving support through the National Referral Mechanism are entitled to housing support, but are often encouraged to apply for housing through the local authority if eligible, to free up bedspaces for people with no recourse to public funds.

Accommodations for accessibility barriers, such as not having English as their first language or learning disabilities, are not always provided, leaving women struggling to navigate the housing system.

Women experiencing sexual exploitation are not offered the same protection and entitlements as people experiencing domestic abuse, despite often having similar support needs, particularly around housing. They should be assessed as priority need for housing due to the risk of violence, however this does not always happen because their situation is not recognised as violent and exploitative and instead seen as consensual.

The shortage of social housing means that women are often left waiting for a long time without the security that they need to rebuild their lives.

Women with no recourse to public funds are generally only able to access housing support if they have children or if they are being supported under the National Referral Mechanism. Local authorities do not receive funding to cover the costs of providing accommodation and financial support to people with no recourse to public funds, putting additional strain on already tight budgets.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions takes urgent action to ensure that people are not left destitute and vulnerable to exploitation under Universal Credit including:

- Increasing Universal Credit rates to account for recent inflation and ensure that they are regularly uprated in line with inflation
- Increasing rates for people under 25 to the same level as those aged 25 and over
- Restricting the amount that can be deducted from the Universal Credit Standard Allowance until rates are increased to reflect the high cost of living
- Replacing advance payments with a non-repayable grant
- Uprating Local Housing Allowance in line with inflation

Recommendation 2: We recommend the implementation of a unified landlord register across England to prevent landlords who have engaged in exploitative arrangements from being able to rent out properties.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that the government introduce a statutory definition of adult sexual exploitation to ensure a consistent understanding and recognition of the ways that sexual exploitation presents itself in adulthood.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that housing entitlements offered to victims/survivors of domestic abuse be explicitly offered to victims/survivors of sexual exploitation.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that the government prioritise building social housing and replenishing social housing stock when properties are sold to ensure sufficient provision of affordable housing.

Recommendation 6: We recommend that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities provide funding to local authorities for suitable and safe accommodation and any other costs incurred by supporting individuals and families who have experienced abuse and exploitation with no recourse to public funds, including the option of single-gender and self-contained housing.

Introduction

The STAGE project, supported by the National Lottery Community Fund, brings together charities Changing Lives, The Angelou Centre, Ashiana, GROW, A Way Out, Together Women, Basis, and WomenCentre to provide trauma-informed support for women who have been groomed for sexual exploitation across the North East and Yorkshire.

Since STAGE began in 2019, we have supported over 500 women affected by sexual exploitation, many of whom have existing vulnerabilities, including experiences of stigma, discrimination, and disadvantage.

The briefing is based on learning from the women supported by STAGE. Over 28% of women accessing support by STAGE were identified to have housing needs. We present evidence obtained through a series of workshops with project staff that highlights the need for safe accommodation provision for survivors of sexual exploitation, regardless of their immigration status, multi-agency working and information sharing, and accountability of local housing authorities.

What is Adult Sexual Exploitation?

Sexual exploitation of adults is a form of sexual abuse that is poorly understood and rarely recognised across many sectors. Whereas understanding and responses to child sexual exploitation (CSE) have improved, particularly since the statutory definition of CSE was published in 2017, women whose vulnerabilities have been exploited for the advantage of others from a young age, rather than being seen as people who have been subjected to horrific forms of sexual abuse they are described as 'prostitutes' or blamed for 'making poor choices'.

Sexual exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a person into sexual activity. This is often done in exchange for something the individual needs or wants (e.g., money, food, shelter, drugs) and disproportionately advantages the perpetrator (e.g., financial advantage, increased status). In some cases, the perpetrator will be instrumental in creating the need, thus making the individual dependent on them (e.g., encouraging drug use to create addiction). It can result from grooming over a period of time, where the perpetrator makes the other dependent on them emotionally, physically and/or financially.

Sex work and sexual exploitation should not be conflated. While sex work may be consensual, this is not the case for sexual exploitation. A person cannot consent to a sexual activity if they see no reasonable alternative to engaging in the activity or have a reasonable belief that not engaging in the activity would result in negative consequences for themselves or others. This does not, however, deny that exploitation occurs within sex work, or that people who engage in any form of sex work are at risk of exploitation.

Cost of Living

The current cost of living has made it more difficult for women to escape exploitative situations and in some cases has caused women to return to their abuser, continuing the cycle of abuse.

The high cost of living has led to high rates of homelessness, which in turn leaves more people vulnerable to exploitation and makes it harder for people to escape abuse and achieve independence. Government figures show that homelessness rates in England between January and March 2023 were the highest since records began, with 79,840 households assessed as being owed a prevention or relief duty¹. Many women experiencing sexual exploitation would not be included in these figures as they are more likely to experience hidden forms of homelessness such as sofa surfing.

Women who do have their own homes are faced with rising rental costs, and those on Universal Credit or other benefits are further challenged by the fact that the Local Housing Allowance has been frozen since April 2020. This leaves women having to cover the remainder of their rent with the rest of their Universal Credit allowance, leaving even less money for food, utilities and other essentials.

When people are unable to afford the essentials, they must turn to alternative sources of income and security. STAGE partners have seen an increase in women requesting food vouchers, clothes, and help with gas and electricity bills, including women who have not previously needed to access this kind of support. However, other options are dangerous. Many women supported by STAGE have had rent arrears and borrowed money from untrustworthy sources such as loan sharks or abusive ex-partners, which ultimately has left them exposed to multiple forms of exploitation.

¹ [Statutory homelessness in England: January to March 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-january-to-march-2023)

Many women rely on food banks. Food bank use is rising across the UK² but even this support is limited. Food banks are intended to address acute food shortages rather than long-term deprivation, so most only accept three vouchers every six months. Many women therefore find themselves having maxed out the amount of emergency food they are entitled to and feel that they have no other option but to engage in survival sex or return to their abusers.

The government provided support in 2022-23 to help people cope with the rising cost of living, but there were challenges with the way this was distributed. From October 2022 to March 2023, all households in England, Scotland and Wales received £400 towards their energy bills paid in instalments of £66-67 a month. Those on means-tested benefits, such as Universal Credit, also received a £650 one-off cost of living payment paid in two instalments.

While this support was very much needed, for women experiencing exploitation, it did not always help ease the cost of living and made them vulnerable to further exploitation. Women experiencing sexual exploitation often encounter other forms of exploitation, including financial exploitation, meaning that any extra money they receive goes into the pockets of their abusers. Furthermore, for women struggling with substance dependency as a result of their trauma, the temptation to spend a lump sum of money on drugs or alcohol in order to numb their pain can be overwhelming.

One-off payments make it difficult for people to budget and do not address the fact that Universal Credit rates are not enough for people to live on. Archetype analysis by the Poverty Strategy Commission³ found that a single person who is unemployed but looking for work and relying solely on Universal Credit would be in deep poverty (calculated as being more than 50% below the poverty line) even before any benefit deductions such as

² [Trussell Trust](#)

³ [PSC-Framework-Report-230831-Web-FINAL-revised.pdf \(povertystrategycommission.org.uk\)](#)

repayments of advance payments. A lone parent with a young child would also be below the poverty line – 37% of all people in poverty are living in a family with no work expectations.

This immense financial difficulty makes it hard for people vulnerable to or experiencing exploitation to access and maintain housing. Young people under 25 in particular, who are only eligible for a lower rate of Universal Credit, have found themselves failing affordability assessments even for social housing – the most affordable housing on the market.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions takes urgent action to ensure that people are not left destitute and vulnerable to exploitation under Universal Credit including:

- Increasing Universal Credit rates to account for recent inflation and ensure that they are regularly updated in line with inflation
- Increasing rates for people under 25 to the same level as those aged 25 and over
- Restricting the amount that can be deducted from the Universal Credit Standard Allowance until rates are increased to reflect the high cost of living
- Replacing advance payments with a non-repayable grant
- Uprating Local Housing Allowance in line with inflation

The cost-of-living crisis has also put added strain on third sector organisations. On several occasions, STAGE partners have had to place women in hotels, due to delayed and limited support by the local authority. In 2022, one STAGE partner spent over £5000 on hotel fees. This was part-funded by the local authority, but the charity also had to use its own funds. They found that the more they picked up the shortfall to deal with housing emergencies, the more pressure they felt from the local authority to deal with future crises without local authority support.

Survival Sex

There has been an increase in hidden homelessness for women supported by STAGE due to significant financial hardship. Hidden homelessness refers to forms of homelessness which are not visible either on the streets or in official statistics. This includes staying with friends, relatives or acquaintances (sofa surfing), squatting and living in overcrowded or unsafe conditions. Such arrangements often involve women being required to provide sexual services in exchange for accommodation.

The rising cost of living combined with the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in many individuals losing their jobs, has led to services seeing an increase in the number of people becoming involved in survival sex - exchanging sex to meet immediate needs such as food, shelter or to provide for their children - for the first time. For women with multiple unmet needs such arrangements can be highly exploitative.

For women engaging in survival sex due to hidden homelessness it can be very challenging to gain financial independence. Couch surfing and lacking a stable address can make it difficult to apply for benefits, leaving women stuck with survival sex or exploitative arrangements as seemingly their only option.

Arrangements where a person offers or provides accommodation for free or reduced costs in exchange for sexual services are often referred to as 'sex for rent'. This can be either formal 'rent' arrangements between a landlord and tenant or more informal arrangements such as providing a hotel room.

In cases of sex for rent there is almost always an element of control stemming from a financial imbalance between the person providing the accommodation and the person providing the sexual services. There is often an urgent need for accommodation in these arrangements, where the individual may be experiencing homelessness or fleeing abuse.

Sex for rent arrangements are often advertised online discreetly and carefully worded to not directly reference the exchange of sexual services for accommodation. These adverts will often prompt the applicants to communicate through encrypted messaging services rather than through the advertising website itself and will request applications in the form of personal photographs. This is done to avoid detection and to make it difficult to prove that they are coercing women into what would legally be considered sex work.

Case study:

A was placed in a B&B by her local authority following making a statement against the owner of the escort agency she had been working for, which was known to the police and support services for taking advantage of its staff. A experience both sexual exploitation and forced labour at the hands of the owner of the B&B, which had been used for years to house vulnerable households. The exploitation began when A was evicted from the B&B, but the owner offered her a place back in exchange for sexual services and cooking and cleaning the entire site. Following multiple reports to the police, the owner was removed from the register of approved properties held by the local authority but no further action was taken by the police.

A was then placed temporarily in a family home due to the lack of one-bedroom properties in the area. This meant that her housing benefit did not cover the entirety of the rent and she ended up in rent arrears. She reluctantly returned to sex work to make ends meet ('survival sex') but by this point she was using drugs and alcohol to dissociate from the trauma she had experienced and to cope with meeting clients, so most of the money went to fund her addiction. When she disclosed to her social worker that she was engaging in survival sex the social worker dismissed her and told her that there are a lot of people on Universal Credit who manage so she should too.

Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales utilise landlord registers to provide protection for tenants, however this protection does not cover tenants in England. Instead, procedures for landlords are varied across English local authority areas. We have found that where a local authority area requires a landlord to register or to undergo a DBS check in order to let out their property, this has led to instances of landlords moving to another area that does not have these requirements.

Recommendation 2: We recommend the implementation of a unified landlord register across England to prevent landlords who have engaged in exploitative arrangements from being able to rent out properties.

Criminalising perpetrators of this form of sexual exploitation or preventing people from renting out properties is not enough to protect people from exploitative accommodation arrangements unless the housing need is also addressed. Measures need to be taken to address the reasons why people are vulnerable to exploitative practices such as sex for rent arrangements in the first place.

We see many cases where perpetrators will target people who they know are vulnerable or go to locations where they know vulnerable people will be, including homelessness services, but we also saw a rise in women initiating these exchanges and advertising sexual services online during the pandemic in order to meet basic survival needs. Until issues in our housing and homelessness systems are addressed, women will continue to be vulnerable to having their housing needs exploited.

Identifying Exploitation

The distinction between consensual sex work, survival sex and sexual exploitation is not always clear and, while we recommend training to identify sexual exploitation for professionals in sectors such as healthcare and housing, specialist services can play an important role in identifying what kind of support people may need.

Case study:

A STAGE partner received a referral from a GP for H, an 18-year-old woman who was “sex working” to pay rent as she had been sofa surfing between two properties since being kicked out of the home at 14 years old. The referral was made so that H could access sex work support and the GP did not recognise that she was being sexually exploited or the ongoing risks with her living circumstances. In reality, she was actually moving between two properties where she was expected to have sex with the person who lived in the property in order to stay there. The young woman has no child social care records and appears to have completely fallen through the net of safeguarding services, despite being exposed to sexual exploitation since childhood.

In the case study above, even though the GP failed to identify H as being sexually exploited from childhood till this present day, the STAGE partner she was referred to supported both sex workers and people experiencing sexual exploitation so was able to triage the case and allocate it to the right project. Several STAGE partners work with both groups which allows them to offer support to people who have been repeatedly failed by services due to being mistakenly identified as consensual sex workers.

Barriers to Homelessness Support

Our homelessness systems are not designed to meet the needs of women experiencing sexual exploitation, meaning women are often denied access to safe accommodation.

Barriers to refuge accommodation

Women with multiple unmet needs escaping sexual exploitation and seeking safe accommodation are often labelled as 'too high risk' or 'too complex' and are therefore denied mainstream refuge accommodation. Many housing providers and refuges do not accept women who are currently using drugs or alcohol, due to concerns that intoxication would pose a risk to staff and other residents. Drug dependency is often considered only in terms of risk to others, rather than being seen as an indicator of trauma, abuse and self-neglect. Women also face exclusion due to 'challenging behaviour', which is often a trauma response requiring staff trained to de-escalate and support.

Women's options therefore tend to be drastically limited and, if they are ineligible for refuge accommodation, they are often placed in mixed-sex hostels which are not equipped to provide the trauma-informed, gender-specific specialist care that they need. Mainstream housing providers are often not trained to identify signs of abuse and exploitation or how to respond to disclosures, which can ultimately impair women's trust in professionals and services. When women feel unsafe in their accommodation, they will often gravitate back to exploitative perpetrators who may provide them a roof over their head.

Case study:

F, a 19-year-old woman living in supported accommodation for young people, had disclosed multiple rapes to police and the staff in the hostel. Following a discussion with a senior housing support worker, she was advised that 'if you're not kicking and screaming, then it isn't rape'. As a

result, F contacted the police to withdraw her statement. The conversation between F and the support workers was discussed during a multi-agency meeting, and the Designated Liaison Officer was able to relay this information to the rape investigation team.

It is crucial that women are able to access a range of refuge provision, including dispersed accommodation, so that all women, including those experiencing addiction, are able to access safe, suitable accommodation. Following the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 we are meant to see a wider rollout of options such as dispersed refuge accommodation, but this will only be available to victims of domestic abuse.

Evictions

Due to the current demands on the homelessness sector, housing providers are under immense pressure to close bedspaces not being used, meaning women are often evicted when they are absent for a few nights, despite the fact that this is an indicator of exploitation. For women targeted for the purposes of sexual exploitation, there may be numerous reasons why they stay elsewhere including threats or coercion from their abusers; the need to obtain drugs or alcohol to numb the pain of unprocessed trauma; and difficulties coping with the environment of the hostel or refuge. These 'missing episodes' should trigger safeguarding concerns rather than evictions.

Women are also penalised for bringing men into their accommodation for sex. In some circumstances this is justified, such as when a woman is staying in a single-sex refuge, but STAGE has also observed examples where excessively strict housing rules have decreased women's likelihood to reach out for help when needed, for fear they will be evicted.

National Referral Mechanism

Survivors of sexual exploitation who are being supported through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) are entitled to housing support, whether or not they have no recourse to public funds. While their trafficking claim is being considered by the Single Competent Authority, potential victims of trafficking can be placed in safehouses by NRM support providers. However, those with recourse to public funds are often advised to apply for housing through the local authority due to the lack of bedspaces in safehouses and the need to house those with no recourse to public funds. Such an approach fails to take into consideration that women need accommodation urgently and should not be expected to wait the amount of time it takes to access social housing in order to escape exploitation.

Communication and accessibility barriers

Another barrier faced by women who have experienced or are at risk of sexual exploitation is the lack of funding and, on occasions, willingness to use interpreters for people for whom English is not their first language. In order to access any sort of support, including housing, survivors ought to be given information in a manner that they understand, and which allows them to raise any queries they may have.

Accessibility provisions should also take into consideration people's additional learning needs, as many women who have experienced sexual exploitation have diagnosed and undiagnosed learning disabilities. Learning disability advocates can help women to navigate the housing application process, making it more accessible and inclusive.

Social Housing

For women who are unable to access supported accommodation, who do not require much additional support, or who are ready to move on from this provision, often the only affordable option is social housing. However, women again face unnecessary barriers to securing a permanent home away from exploitation.

People experiencing sexual exploitation are not offered the same protection and entitlements as people experiencing domestic abuse, despite often having similar support needs particularly around housing. Coercive control and fear of repercussions are common features in both, and victims/survivors of both sexual exploitation and domestic abuse often require new accommodation or refuge provision to escape from their abuser. This often includes needing to relocate out of area to avoid detection, however only victims/survivors of domestic abuse are entitled to apply for social housing outside of their local authority area.

“When you’re fleeing domestic abuse, you’re usually only fleeing one person. When you’re fleeing sexual exploitation, you’re potentially fleeing an entire organised crime group” Case worker

The burden of proof that they are at risk of violence or lack alternative options tends to be higher for women escaping sexual exploitation compared to women escaping domestic abuse. The Homelessness Code of Guidance (para 21.24) states that *“housing authorities should not have a blanket approach toward domestic abuse which requires corroborative or police evidence to be provided⁴”*, however this does not apply to sexual exploitation survivors whose abuse did not take place within an intimate or family relationship.

⁴ [Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/671111/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities.pdf)

Strict requirements for proof of the risk of violence fails to take into account that women experiencing sexual exploitation are often too scared to report such incidents, either because of past negative experiences with the police, fears of being criminalised themselves, or being threatened by their abusers.

Women who have experienced sexual exploitation should be assessed as priority need for homelessness support due to the risk of violence, however this does not always happen because their situation is not recognised as violent and exploitative and instead seen as 'consensual'. This again demonstrates the need for a comprehensive statutory definition of adult sexual exploitation, so that services including housing services understand how to recognise and address such cases.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that the government introduce a statutory definition of adult sexual exploitation to ensure a consistent understanding and recognition of the ways that sexual exploitation presents itself in adulthood.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that housing entitlements offered to victims/survivors of domestic abuse be explicitly offered to victims/survivors of sexual exploitation.

For those who are eligible for social housing, often the only available properties are unsuitable. Housing women in areas with high crime rates often puts them in close proximity to those who might exploit and abuse them further. Survivors from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds have also reported being offered properties in areas that are known not to be very welcoming. Women are then penalised for declining offers, despite the offers being unsuitable to their needs. Taking time to examine women's housing needs and finding accommodation that is appropriate and suitable to their needs, instead of doing the minimum statutory

requirements, can make a huge difference in a survivor's transition out of exploitation.

Case study:

A housing officer from Leeds Council was attending the weekly drop-ins run by a STAGE partner and would help women with bidding for social housing. Unfortunately, since the Covid-19 pandemic this service has stopped. Having a single point of contact interacting face-to-face with women with multiple unmet needs made a stressful process less complicated and more accessible for both women and staff.

Even though the process of applying for housing when homeless might be similar across local authorities, there is an expectation for survivors to repeat their stories, which can be incredibly triggering. Being able to have such discussions face-to-face instead over the phone, as well as request this information from the individual's caseworker (where available) can be very helpful and more trauma informed.

The waits for social housing are very long in some areas, leaving women in limbo. STAGE partners have supported women that took years to be housed in a permanent address, despite being on a higher priority band when bidding for houses. Lack of identification or a bank account and having insecure immigration status can further delay the process.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that the government prioritise building social housing and replenishing social housing stock when properties are sold to ensure sufficient provision of affordable housing.

No Recourse to Public Funds

Adults with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) are generally not eligible for housing support although, under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, the local authority is required to provide accommodation and financial support if a child in the household has been assessed by social services as being in need. Despite this entitlement, STAGE partners have found that local authorities often have to be reminded of their legal duties to assist families with housing.

Section 17 support is temporary, and families are often not given a choice about the location of this accommodation, although it should be suitable for the children and families it is intended for. Local authorities are also given no additional funding to cover the costs of providing accommodation and financial support to people with NRPF.

Women with NRPF and no children eligible for housing support are often left completely isolated with no way of securing accommodation that would allow them to escape from their abusers. Their only way to access housing support is through the National Referral Mechanism but, as detailed in STAGE's briefing on the [experiences of Black and minoritised women](#), getting such a referral is not always simple.

Recommendation 6: We recommend that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities provide funding to local authorities for suitable and safe accommodation and any other costs incurred by supporting individuals and families who have experienced abuse and exploitation with no recourse to public funds, including the option of single-gender and self-contained housing.

Case study:

B, originally from the Philippines and a mother of two children under 10, one of whom is autistic, was supported by STAGE. B was engaging in sex work of her own volition when she first came to UK with a spousal visa but things changed dramatically once her partner and his friends got involved and began sexually exploiting her.

After leaving her partner, B was stuck in a hotel room with her two children for several months. During this time, her ex-partner made a series of allegations against her, which resulted in her being separated from her children. She felt that she was treated harshly by professionals because of her past choice of work.

Her STAGE caseworker supported B to get her children back, and eventually B's was granted a Destitute Domestic Violence Concession was granted, meaning she was eligible for publicly funded support in the UK. However, despite this, B felt that she had to give her children's care to the local authority and find full-time employment to make ends meet. She has since disengaged from services and started communicating with her abusive former partner.

In B's case above, she felt that she was treated poorly because of her previous choice to engage in sex work. Survivors of sexual exploitation are often wrongfully identified to be engaging in consensual sex work, and thus, are deemed not to be at risk of abuse. Women with no recourse to public funds are particularly vulnerable to this misconception as they can only access housing once their abuse is recognised.

Feeling secure and having a safe space to live should not be a privilege, and we urge decisionmakers at a local and national level to consider the findings and recommendations in this briefing and take action to protect women.



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