

History of Women's Aid: The Beginning



Trainer: Dr Bianca Petkova

Introductions

&

any thoughts on history ?

Periods in WA history

- Beginning of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) & the formation of Women's Aid -1970s to 1980s
- Consolidation & regional development - **1990s** onwards
- Surviving austerity and after – **2008** onwards



Questions to consider:

1. What were the main preoccupations of women on the march?
2. Any overall impressions/ comments?

VIDEO

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ZeowophZe8>

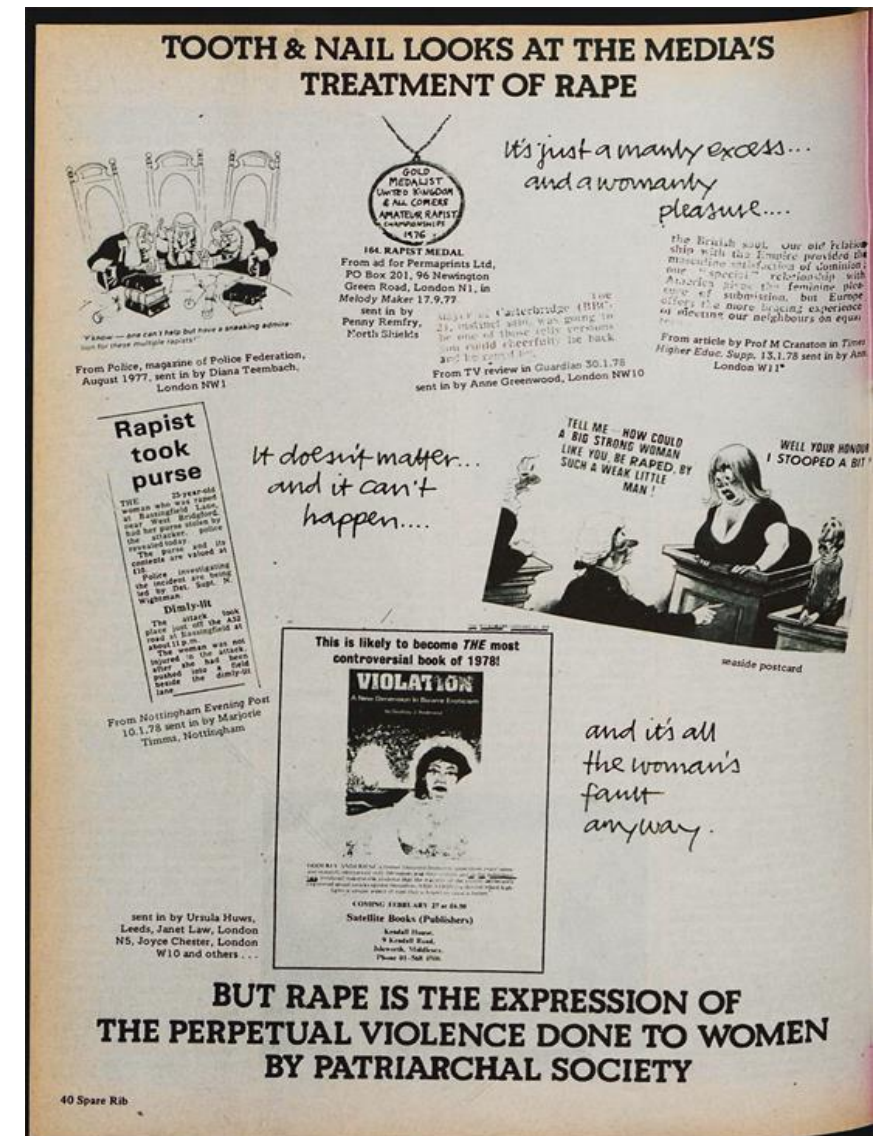
1971 first WLM march - students at University College London

'He's got to show her who is the boss'

- Mrs B's husband switched off the heating and locked away the food whenever he went away from the house
- Miss C was kept short of money
- Miss A's husband forced her to have sex with his friends

These women were battered and came to Women's Aid Refuge

Spare Rib, 69, April 1978, National Women's Aid Federation article & a discussion of rape on the same page – see picture above



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Social context - 70s +

- The concept **domestic abuse/ violence** did not exist.
- Judges and police officers viewed wife beating as **a trivial offense** — would tell husbands to calm down and wives to stop annoying them.
- Many academics saw DA as if rooted in human **'nature'**:
'women are naturally programmed to be quiet and passive, while men are wired biologically to be aggressive and dominant...' (Tiger and Fox, 1972)
- Many psychiatrists & psychologists saw DA as an **individual pathology** of (defective) men and women.

'Biological bases' for male abuse

- 'the primitive rage reactions leading to aggression and battering are**instinctual patterns**. Angry and aggressive responses are wired in the **mammalian brain**...' (Deschner JP, 1984, *The Hitting Habit*. New York Free Press)
- Buss (1988) argues that males have developed strategies for **mate retention**. These include **direct guarding, (restricting movements)** of the female and negative inducements to prevent her straying (**financial control, threat of violence** if they are unfaithful or even so much as look at another man, etc.)
- 'in nearly **75 %** of the cases...involving serious marital discord, **particularly wife beating**, the abuser typically reveals an **abnormal blood glucose level**' (Hungerford cited in Dobash & Dobash, 1992: 236)

Victim blaming

- ‘the victim in spouse assaults **can always be assumed to have played a crucial role in the offence** and may have directly or indirectly **brought about** or precipitated **their own victimisation**’ (Schultz L G.1960 ‘The wife assaulter’. *Journal of Social Therapy* 6. (2) 103-12.)
- ‘the victim is the one who is acting out, initiating the interaction between her and the offender, and **by her behaviour she generates the potentiality for criminal behaviour of the offender** and **triggers this potentiality, if it exists before in him.**’ (Amir M (1971) *Patterns of Forcible Rape*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 259)

What it meant for domestic abuse survivors at the time...

- In one case, a man who had battered his mistress with the **leg of an iron bedstead** after **she taunted** him about his sexual prowess had **his sentence halved to four years** because the appeal judge felt he had been subjected to **“very real provocation”**.
- Another man tried for strangling his wife was cleared of **murder** after claiming **she was always complaining and had shouted at him with a “vicious look on her face.”** Sentencing him for manslaughter, the judge said he had **never come across a case where anyone had endured so much provocation** and gave him just **three years on probation**.

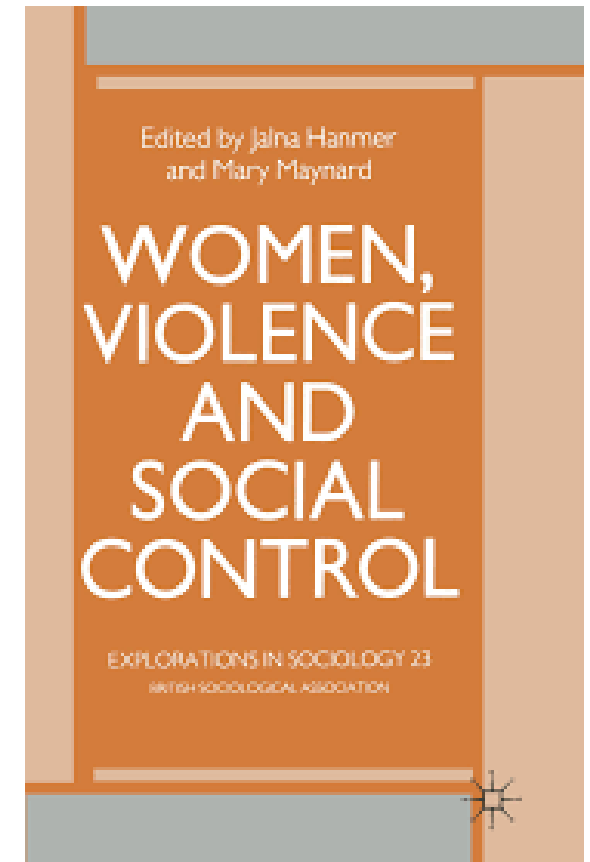


<https://www.gazette-news.co.uk/news/16273040.cant-beat-woman---story-behind-minorities-exhibition/>

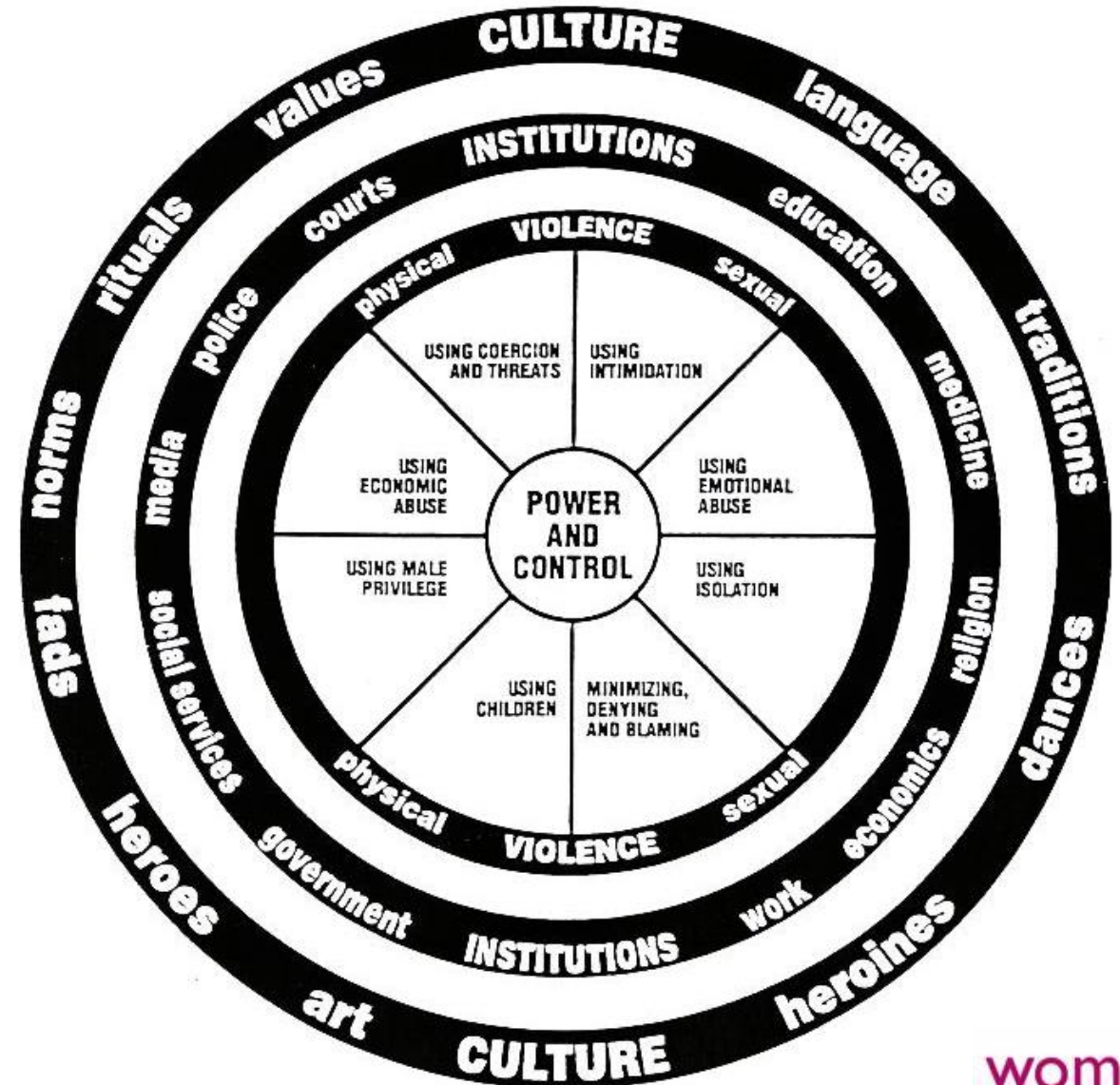
Defining the problem of male violence

‘...the role of violence is to constantly remind the **dominated of her place....violence** is an essential ingredient **of social control**.....force and threats are not merely the consequence of social organisation but are in fact the building blocks of power relations.**the State is an agent of male power and control** in the **subjection of women...**’

Violence and the Social Control of Women - Power and the State , (**Jalna Hanmer**. London: Croom Helm, 1978)



Duluth Culture Wheel



Beginnings

- Women's Aid grew out **the Women's Liberation movement**
- Engagement with **radical feminism (RF)**
- **Feminisms**
- WLM held **conferences** from **1970 - 78** (the first one in 1970, Ruskin College, London)
- The main topics of the conferences - equal pay, education, equal opportunities in employment, reproductive rights **and violence against women**

The 7 demands of the UK Women's Liberation Movement

Passed at the National WLM Conference, Skegness 1971

1. Equal pay
2. Equal educational and job opportunities
3. Free contraception and abortion on demand
4. Free 24-hour nurseries

Passed at the National WLM Conference, Edinburgh 1974

5. Legal and financial independence for all women
6. The right to a self-defined sexuality. An end to discrimination against lesbians

Passed at the National WLM Conference, Birmingham 1978

7. **Freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion** regardless of marital status; and an end to the laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and aggression to women

Liberal and radical feminisms

(2nd wave feminism)

- **Liberal feminism** – insists on equality for women; attempts to include women in existing social structures to achieve this
- **Radical feminism**– insists on major social re-organisation & the elimination of **patriarchy**

An example:

- Liberal feminism - women should have equal access to men to the **arm forces**
- Radical feminism – women should struggle to **eliminate war**

Central feminist principles:

- **Personal is political** – domestic abuse is not a ‘private’ and a personal matter – it is an integral part of gender politics – women’s oppression at home and in the ‘public’ is on a continuum. DA is a social & political issue.
- **Consciousness raising (CR)** - an understanding of how women as individuals, fit within a broad socio-political context. The importance of **women-only spaces**. **Patriarchy** & its **links** with class, race, sexuality....
- **Sisterhood is powerful** – Women can support one another and be strong together & with collective action we can change the world.
Empowerment and **services for women by women**.



Women's Aid movement

- The **term "domestic violence"** was first used by **Women's Aid** in an address to Parliament in 1973, ('**wife battering**' was a common term used throughout the 70's)
- WA subscribed to the **7 feminist demands** of the WLM
- Initially **survivors and volunteers** run the refuges – much was learnt from this about what survivors' needs are & how to support & empower each other, how to organise etc.
- First WA refuges were **collectives** (this meant - equal pay; joint decision making; flexible roles; no hierarchy)
- **2 main early rules for refuges**
 1. **open door policy**, no 'proof' of DA needed; any woman who asks for **a refuge** is accepted
 2. **self-determination** of refuges - a group of women who support one another

Domestic abuse refuges

- In the 70s - formation of **women's centres**
- **Brixton** Black Women's Group, **1973**, leading later to the formation of the first **Black Women's Centre**
- The idea of **safe houses** arose from these activities.
- First women's refuge in **1971** in **Cheswick** – Erin Pizzey (ideologically **different**, non-feminist – Cheswick refuge split from the rest of the movement)
- **1974** – **National Women's Aid Federation** formed bringing together **40** refuges
- **1976** – **Rape crisis centre** in London on collective basis



Re-organisation of Women's Aid

- **Separation** into Women's Aid **England, Scotland, Wales** and **Northern Ireland**
- Women's Aid Federation of England (**WAFE**) founded in March **1996** – office in Bristol, (now also London)
- A **member** organisation – **168 member services**
- National office - a **co-ordinating body** - aims to assist local refuges which are autonomous. Policy development, campaigning, research, public education, training, participate in AGMs and run **national conferences**; some direct services
- Local WA services offer direct **practical & emotional support to survivors**



<https://womenslibrary.org.uk/discover-our-projects/speaking-out/>

Scottish WA

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Scottish WA



Northern Ireland
Spare Rib covered the Troubles in Northern Ireland by putting women's experience at the forefront. Testimonies of how girls and women suffered in the Troubles, and how **sexual violence** was used to intimidate and control them.



Women and children in a refuge in the 1970s Women's Aid,
<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/news/uncovering-stories-women-who-pioneered-refuge-movement>



Welsh Women's Aid, <https://www.walesartsreview.org/welsh-womens-aid/>

break

Bristol, Women's Aid, 1973

'.....a single bed that happened to be in the Women Centre in 1973 was the seed from which Women's Aid in Bristol grew.

*The centre often received calls from the police and the Samaritans to see if they could help women and children who were experiencing domestic violence, **and it soon became clear that there was a real need for services** to help vulnerable women in Bristol. '*

'women's safe houses' acted as spaces of mutual aid and co-operation, embodying many of the political ideals of the women's movement '

<http://feministarchivesouth.org.uk/tag/documentation/>

PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR WOMENS HOUSES

- The house or houses will be run on a day to day basis by the women in residence.
- A rota of helpers will be organised to offer help in seeking practical and legal advice, and aid from social service agencies.
- If possible, there will be a residential worker to ease the burden of night night calls and emergency requests for help. Failing this, such matters will be dealt with on a rota basis.
- If possible, recreational and child minding and play facilities will be organised communally.
- Charges would be paid in a majority of cases by arrangement with the local D.H.S.S. office on a similar basis to those with local authorities for 'Part Three' accommodation.
- Money for extra running costs will be found from private fund raising and charitable sources.
- The residents would cater for themselves (individually or communally as they themselves decide)
- Help would be provided in finding satisfactory accommodation where it would not be possible for women to return to their former homes. The houses will provide temporary accommodation only.

Practical arrangements for women's houses

- The house will be run on a day-to-day basis **by the women in residence**
- A rota of **helpers** will be organised in seeking practical and legal advice and aid from social service agencies
- If possible, there will be **a residential worker** to ease the burden of night calls and emergency requests for help. Failing this such matters will be dealt with on a rota basis.
- If possible recreational and **child minding and play** activities will be organised communally
-
- The residents will **cater for themselves** (either individually or communally as they themselves decide)

Bristol Archive

*'women in the movement had no previous knowledge of **law** or **social policy** so they had to pick things up as they went along. This meant learning how the **complex machinery of the state** worked, negotiating dense **bureaucracy** and exercising **immense powers of diplomacy**.*

*As Ellen (Malos) jokingly reflected, she developed the skill to sit in meetings with sexist men, resist the urge to strangle them and maintain working relationships that helped them **make incremental gains in attaining vital services for women.***

<http://feministarchivesouth.org.uk/tag/documentation>



An early report by WAFE in Bristol on Local Authorities responses to Domestic Abuse

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Remembering the early refugees:

Pragma Patel,
Founding member of Southall Black Sisters & ex director

*The refuge movement was so **vibrant then**. ... In practical ways and in political too. It was a merging of compassion and empathy The projects were **more organic then**, and new and **more holistic** I thinkIt was **consciousness raising** that taught us:*

Women can do it....

Women will do it....

Women are doing it.

(cited in Hague, 2021, p. 70)

Black & minoritised women's refuges



Newham, 1989



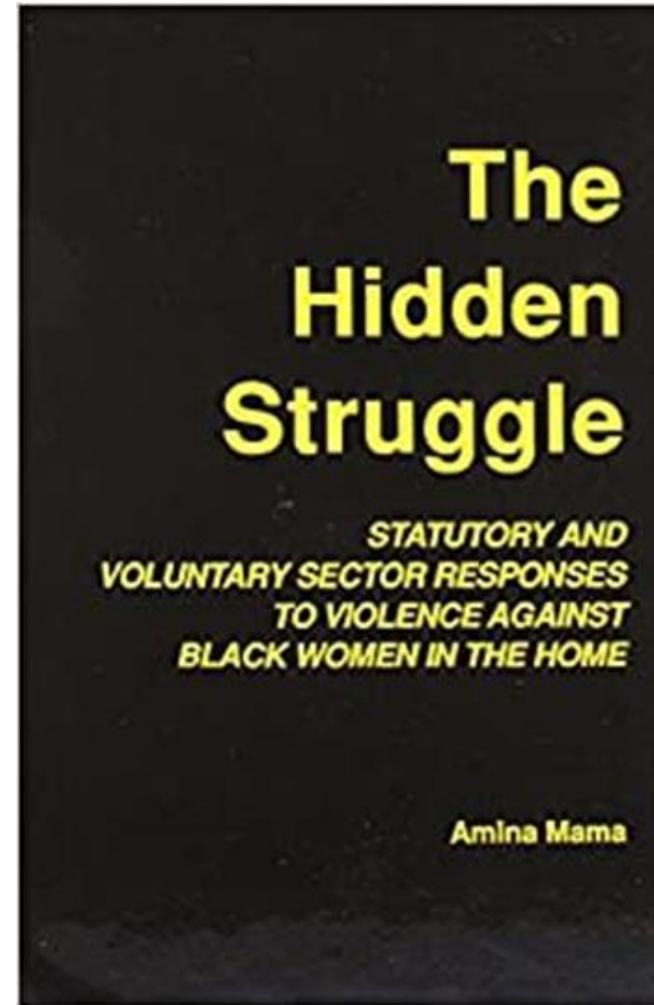
March against Miss World competition, 1970

*'The movement to establish Asian Refuges, came almost a decade later after the White women's {refuges} and it arose out of both, **second wave feminism and anti-racist struggles**' (Freeman & Thiara, 2017:16).*

1970s /80s- Black and minoritised women's refuges and DA services

Examples:

- **Southall Black Sisters** (set up end of 1970s)
- **Asian women resource centre** (Brent, London)
- **Roshni** in Birmingham (set up in 1979)
- **Shakti** in Edinburgh (1986)
- **Ashiana** in Sheffield (1981)
- **Ashiana** in London (1989)
- **Hadhari Nari** in Derby (1986)



FIRST RESEARCH ON
BLACK WOMEN AND
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE -
PUBLISHED, 1989
by **Amina Mama**

This is **the first** research that focuses on domestic violence against black women.

It looks specifically **at the statutory and voluntary sector responses** to such violence.

“Building Blocks: Women's Aid Guide to Running Refuges and Support Services”



Atuki Turner

WA publication, 1996; Atuki Turner, editor

Rebecca Dobash

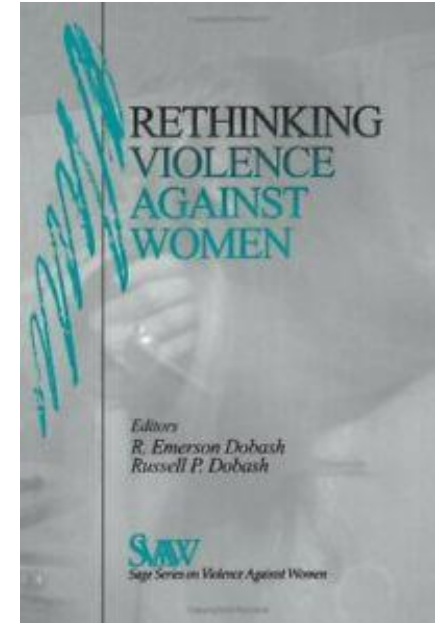
Group work

In your room – listen to the talk & identify 2 or 3 issues you considered important

<https://womenslibrary.org.uk/discover-our-projects/speaking-out/speaking-out-oral-history-clips/>



**Violence against Wives:
A Case against the
Patriarchy, 1983**



**Women, Violence
and Social Change ,
1992; 1998 2nd ed**



Legacy when working with survivors

basic principles:

- providing temporary refuge
- encouraging women to determine their own futures, empowerment
- caring for needs of children
- offering advice and support to any woman that asks for it
- central importance of the perspectives of women and children
- educating and informing the public and other agencies about DA

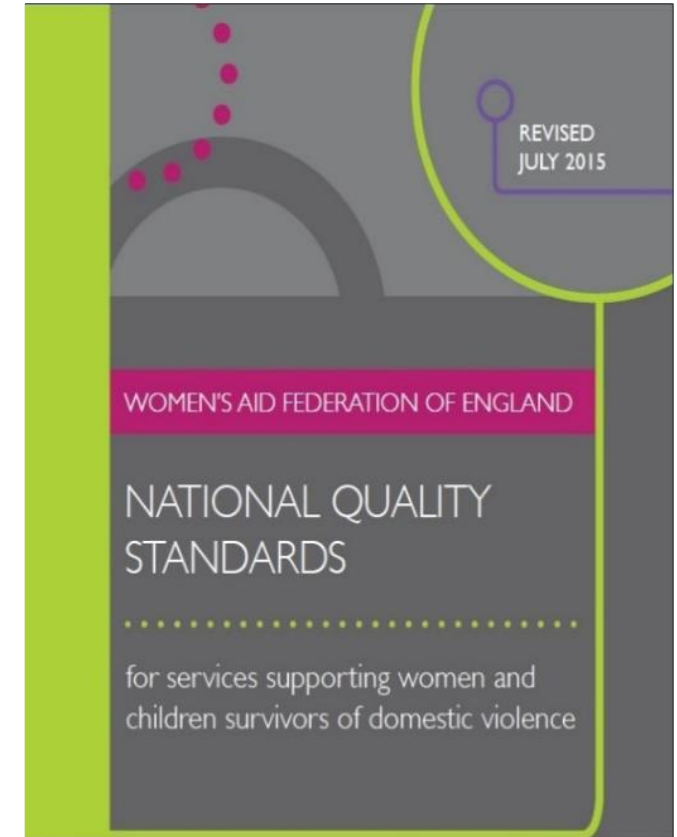


(Dobash and Dobash, 1987: 175; Hague and 16 Malos, 1998: 38)

Feminist principles in the work of Women's Aid Today

The Women's Aid National Quality Standards

1. Safety, security and dignity
2. Rights and access
3. Physical and emotional health
4. Stability, resilience and autonomy
4. Children and young people
5. Leadership and prevention
6. Governance and Accountability



Women's Aid – some achievements

1977: The Housing Act 1977 (Homeless Persons) - through our lobbying, **women** and children at **risk of violence are acknowledged as homeless** and gain the right to state help with temporary accommodation.

1976: We help introduce the first Domestic Violence Bill (**The Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act**), which gives new rights through **civil protection orders (injunctions)** for those at **risk of violence**.

2004: Domestic Violence, Crime & Victims Act - a **criminal sanction** for non-compliance with **non-molestation orders; common assault as an offence** etc.

1987: We establish the first ever National **Domestic Violence Helpline**

1999: We launch the first comprehensive domestic violence website in the UK and **The Gold Book**, the first ever **UK-wide public directory of local refuge and helpline services**.

2008: We published the **Educational Toolkit**, a free manual for teachers and youth organisations, consisting of easy to use

Women's Aid – more achievements

2014 - 2017

- **WAFE National Quality Standards (& accreditation of services)**
- HMIC inspection for DV & Police Responses
- Virtual World – Real fear (conference & report)
- **Criminalising Coercive and/or Controlling Behaviour**
- The Women's Aid and Imkaan Capacity Building Partnership
- **SOS (Save our Services campaign)**
- Women's Access to Justice (report with All Party parliamentary group)
- Lobbying the government with Rights of Women re access to Legal Aid
- Campaigning for the government to ratify the **Istanbul Convention on Preventing & Combatting VAWG**

And more....



Women's Aid – more achievements

2017 to now

- The new **Secure Tenancies** ensures survivors fleeing their homes **can keep a lifetime tenancy**
- An exemption from the 1% rent reduction in social rents for refugees
- Revised guidance **for judges** for cases of child contact where there are allegations of domestic abuse (**Practice Direction 12J**)
- Women's Aid, 2020, report - **A Perfect Storm: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Domestic Abuse Survivors and the Services Supporting Them**
- **Domestic Abuse Act 2021** –making coercive control after the end of a relationship an offence; improving housing rights; prohibiting cross-examination of survivors etc.
- **'Deserve to be heard' campaign**

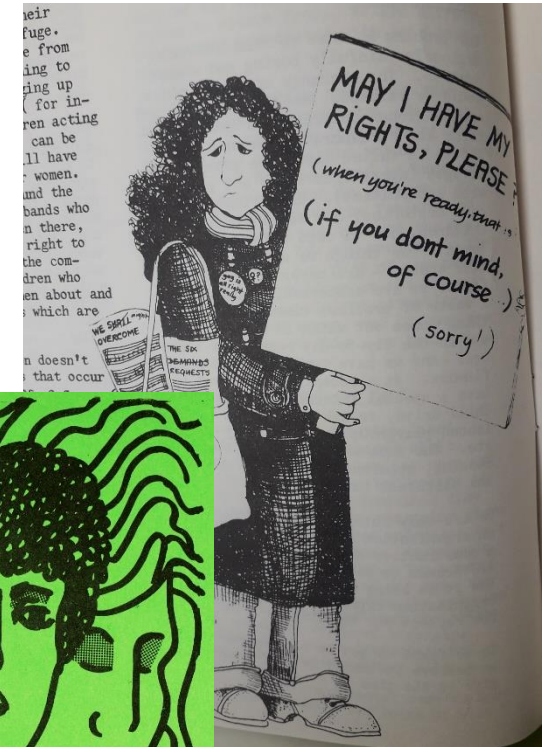
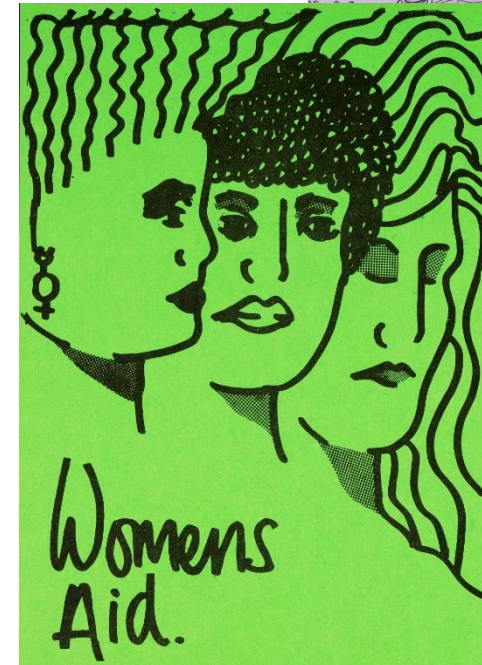
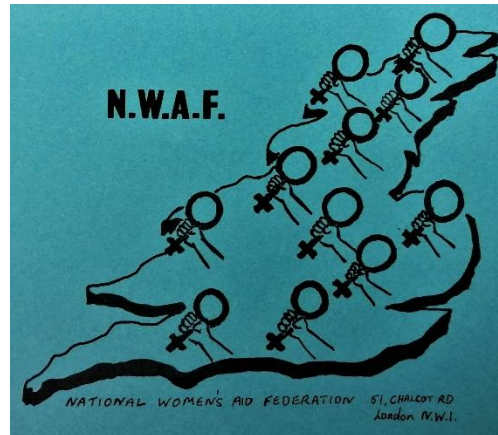
And more....

Women's Aid Federation of England Archive

Want to find out more about the history of Women's Aid and the domestic abuse movement?

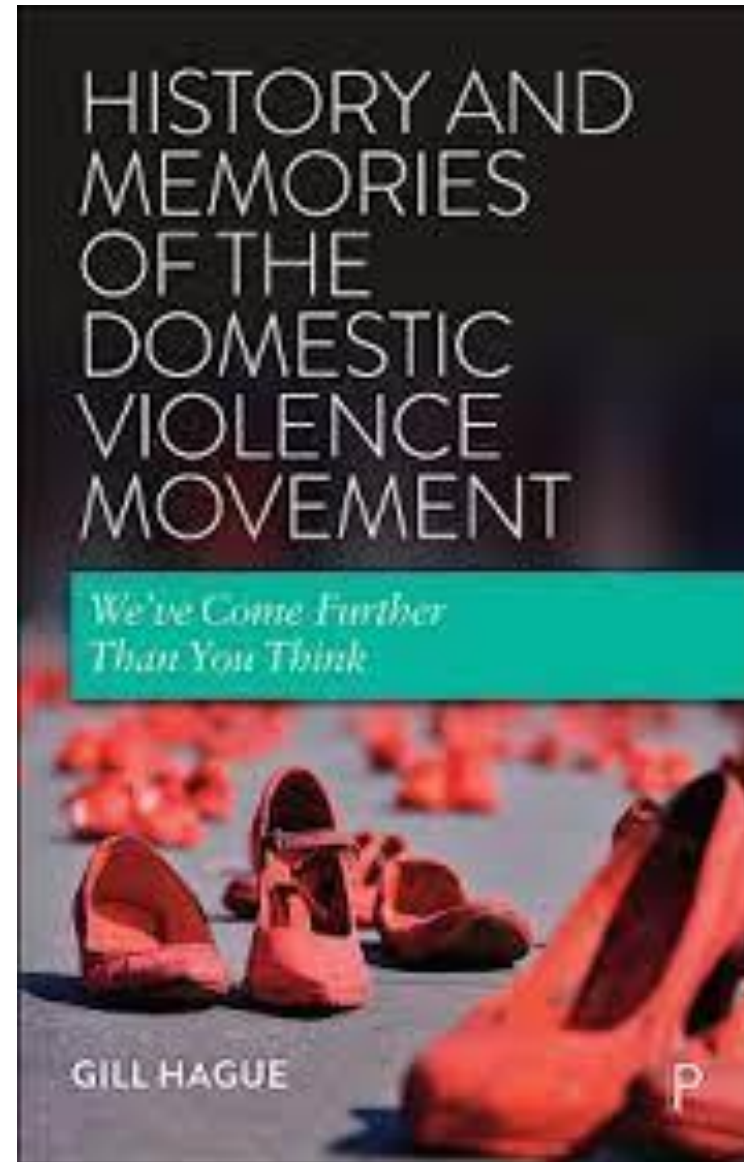
- Your Women's Aid Archive is held at the **University of Leeds** Special Collections and documents the history of the organisation from the 1970s to present day.
- To find out more about what makes up the archive, how to search it, and how to access the material, go straight to our Collection Guide at library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/collection/2963 or visit the Archive page on Ada for more information.

How could your team use the Archive to help and inspire your work today?



Further reading

Hague, G. 2021



Further reading

You can't beat a woman the story of the founding of refuges

by June Freeman & Ravi Thiara

1970s to 1990s

The history of **Newham Asian Women's** Project (known as **London Black Women's Project** since 2017)

8 refuges of East of London (serving mostly white women)

&

an Asian Refuge in North of England



Archives, more info, more reading

- Women's Aid Federation of England Archive, University of Leeds Special Collections, library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/collection/2963
- Gill Hague & Claudia Wilson (2000) The Silenced Pain: Domestic violence 1945-1970, Journal of Gender Studies, 9:2, 157-169, DOI: [10.1080/713677987](https://doi.org/10.1080/713677987)
- Inam, M (2003) 'Taking or Giving Refuge? The Asian Women's Refuge Movement' in Gupta, R (ed.) *From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers: Southall Black Sisters* London: Zed Books
- Archives, Scottish WA - <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/discover-our-projects/speaking-out/>
- Matczak, A., Hatzidimitriadou, E., and Lindsay, J., 2011. Review of Domestic Violence Policies in England and Wales. London: Kingston University and St George's, University of London.
- (Women's Resource Centre) 'Sisters Doing it for Themselves' project website - <https://www.wrc.org.uk/sisters-doing-it-for-themselves>
- Women's Library (holdings on DA – getting currently DA holdings to put out to be available digitally later this yr)
- KEY UK DEVELOPMENTS RELATING TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS
<https://www.centreforwomensjustice.org.uk/timeline>

End of session

Thank you!