

Rising to the Challenge

**Improving reporting and detection of
sexually motivated crimes against sex
workers in East London**

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2012 Olympic Games



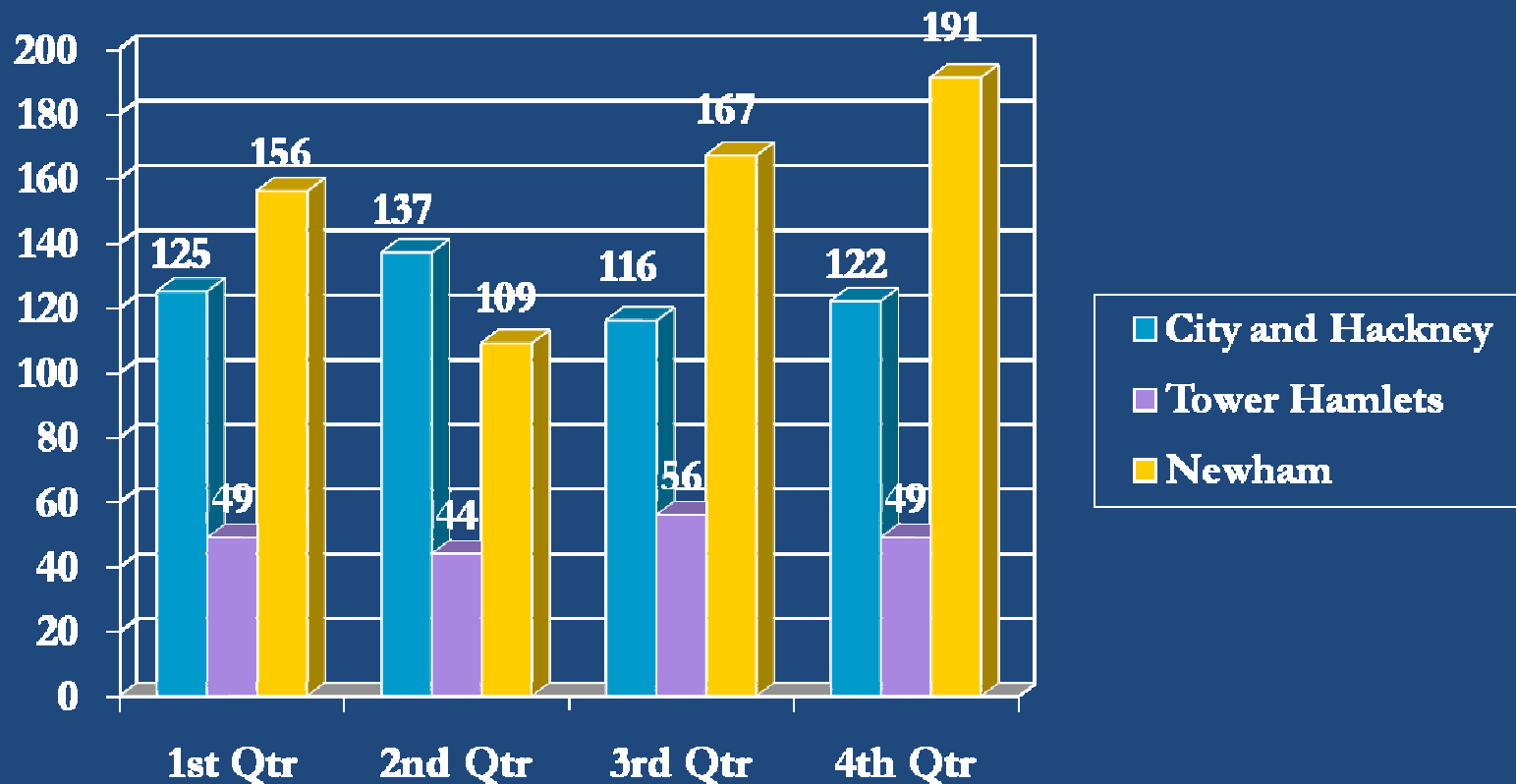
Sex workers in East London

Public Policy

Policing Strategy

- In 2009/10 Open Doors delivered outreach, clinical and case management services to almost 1500 people selling sex in three East London boroughs (both on and off street).
- 1161 people were off street sex workers
- The off street cohort is aged between 18 to mid 40's
- Mean age tends to be mid 20's to early 30's
- Nationality and ethnicity fluctuates from year to year.
- Since 2008, London has experienced an influx of Brazilian sex workers, these women currently make up the majority of our clients (37%)
- Women from Eastern Europe are the second largest group (27%), White UK and Irish our third (20%) whilst women from Thailand and China, Africa and the EU combine are equally represented in numbers and make up 16% of the cohort.

Number of individual women engaged (off street) across the three boroughs 2009/10



- During 2009 OD became aware of an increase in our sex worker clinics reflecting the fact that sex workers were experiencing rape and sexual assault and were not accessing specialist services or reporting to the police.
- Audit conducted in clinic to ascertain what sex workers would do if they or anyone they knew were raped or sexually assaulted.

Question:

'We are trying to find out what women who work in the sex industry would do if they were ever raped or sexually assaulted, either at work or in their personal lives'

- Is there anyone in authority you would speak to?
- Is there any service you would contact?

15 women interviewed

- All sell sex in flats and saunas
- All respondents told us they were here legally
- All but two women (both Romanian) said that they would report to police and would expect to be treated seriously and sensitively by them.
- Both Romanian women felt they would not be taken seriously if they reported because of their sex work history
- All discussed initial fear of deportation if they came to the attention of the authorities.
- All stated that poor command of English upon arrival in UK made it difficult to access support services of any kind.

- Knowledge about services that can support them comes with time, via word of mouth, improved command of English and contact made through outreach services.
- Lack of English is a major barrier to reporting sexual violence and other offences against off street sex workers.
- Becoming familiar with services means that women build more trust and confidence in other services within the community.
- All of the women said they would try to contact Kim (Open Doors nurse), the Open Doors clinic or the AKC if they were raped or sexually assaulted.
- None of the women had heard of the Haven

Off street sex workers are fearful of reporting sexual violence for two distinct reasons:

1. Lack of English and concern about being understood.
2. Distrust of UK statutory institutions

Street sex workers

- Notoriously reluctant to report sexual violence for many reasons:
- Fear of disbelieve and criticism of their lives as sex workers.
- Fear of withdrawal from drugs as most suffer chronic addiction. The likelihood of withdrawal whilst waiting to access medical and police assistance is a massive disincentive to undertaking reporting and forensics.

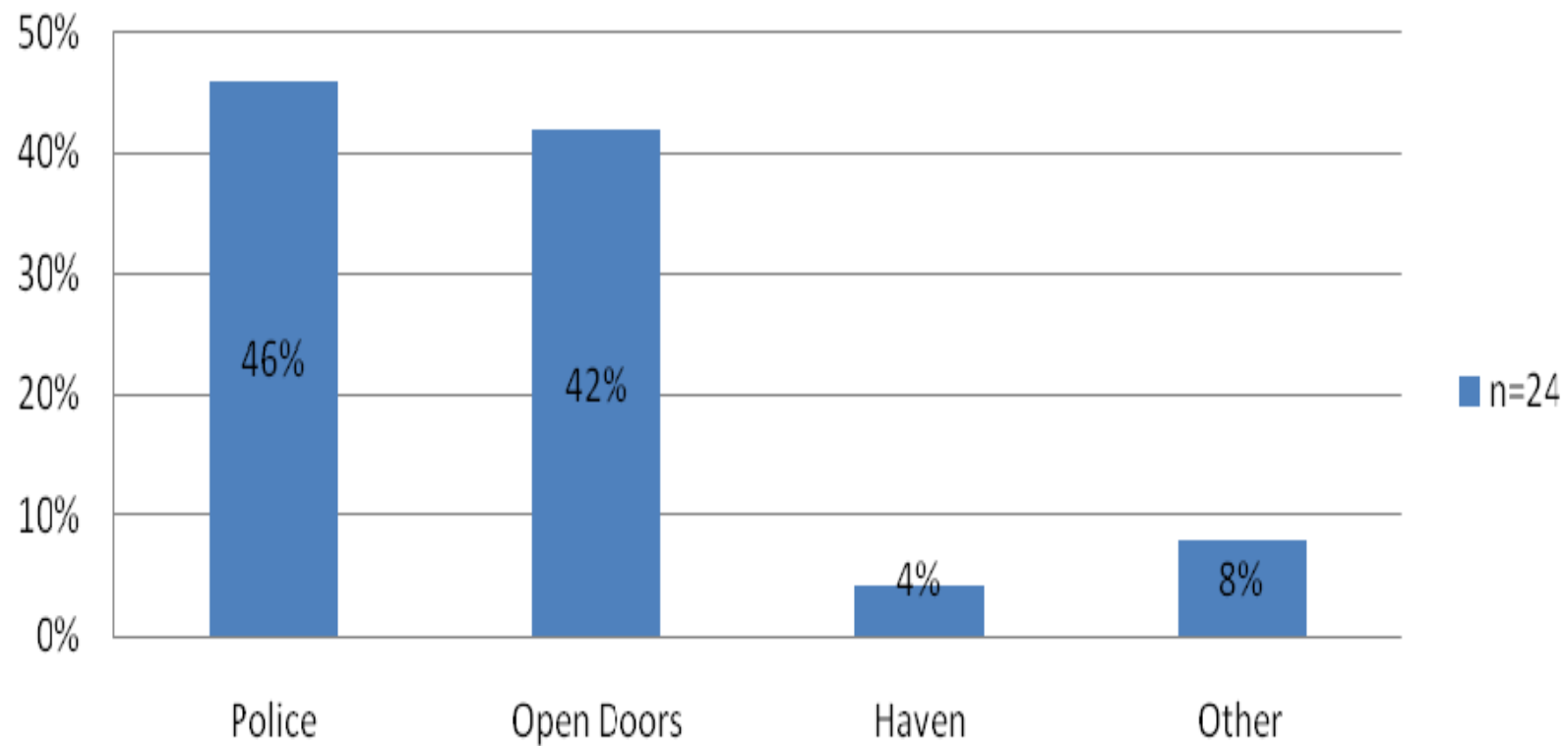
- Metropolitan Police data indicates that in Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham, as elsewhere in London, sex workers are victims of serious sexual violence.
- When compared with the rest of London, the three boroughs also show lower levels of sex workers accessing the Haven after an assault, and higher levels of sex workers withdrawing from the criminal justice system after a report.
- This combined picture of serious violence, relatively high attrition and relatively low access to specialist services illustrates a real need for a dedicated advocate focusing on improving access to services and criminal justice outcomes for sex workers who have experienced sexual violence.

(Draft report on the Open Doors ISVA service – March 2011)

Referrals into the Open Doors ISVA Service

- A total of 24 referrals were made into the specialist ISVA service between 1st September 2010 and 1st March 2011.
- Average of three new referrals per month.
- The greatest source of referrals was the Sapphire teams, who made 11 referrals – 4 via Newham and 6 via City and Hackney/ Tower Hamlets, and 1 via Edmonton.
- The majority of remaining referrals came from Open Doors staff who received 10 disclosures of sexual violence in clinical, outreach and drop-in settings.
- One referral was received from the Haven Whitechapel and two from a local community organisation working with women without recourse to public funds.

ISVA Referrals by Agency



Engagement and contact rates were high for the ISVA service.

Out of the 24 new referrals received, 17 were successfully contacted (71%).

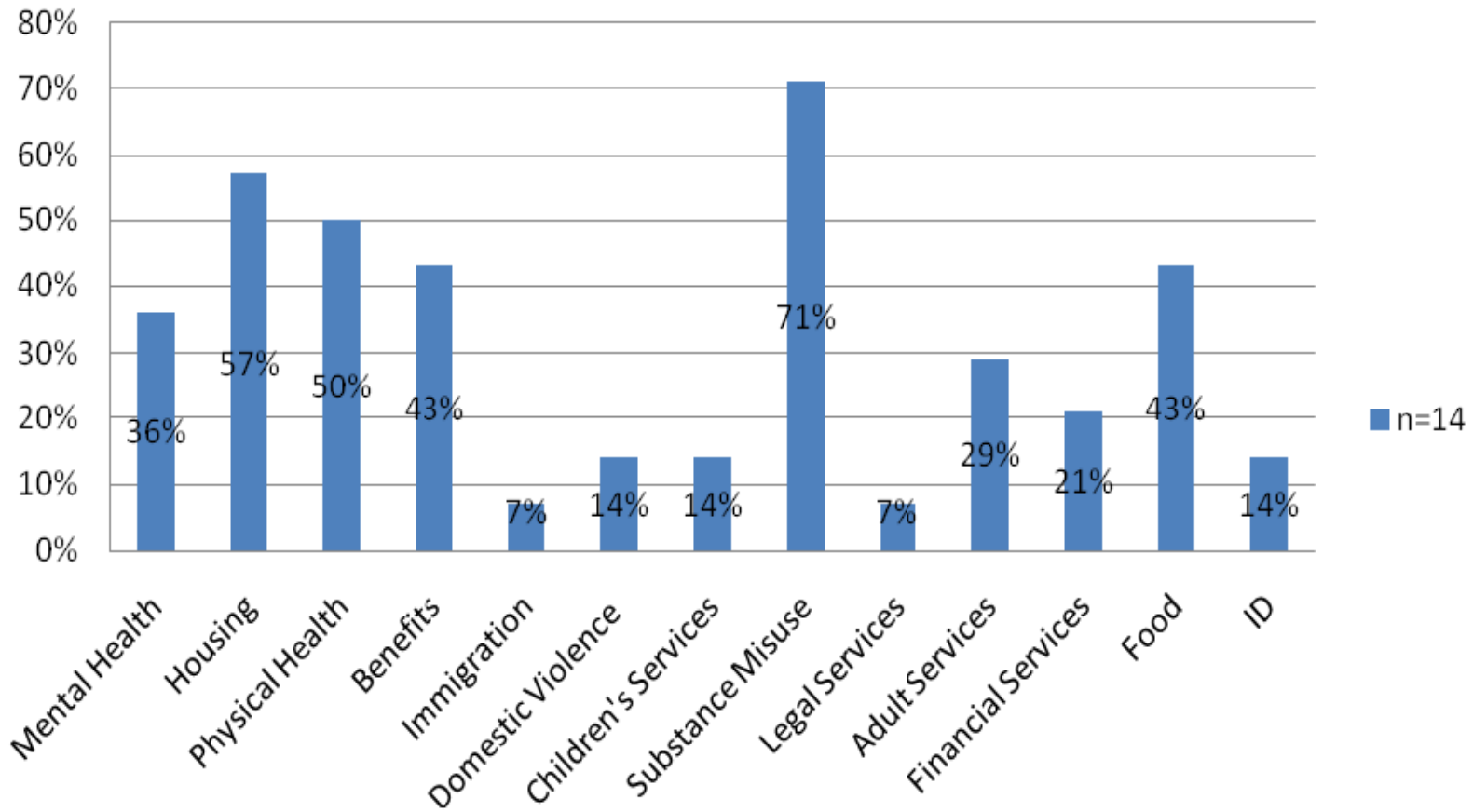
Since many women were without a fixed address or telephone number establishing contact was often a laborious process, with multiple phone calls over several weeks following the referral.

Of the 17 referrals where contact was established, 14 women chose to receive ISVA services (82%).

Referrals to the ISVA service were women, with an average age of 34 (ranging from 22-64).

The majority were street sex workers (n=19) with only three referrals selling sex indoors

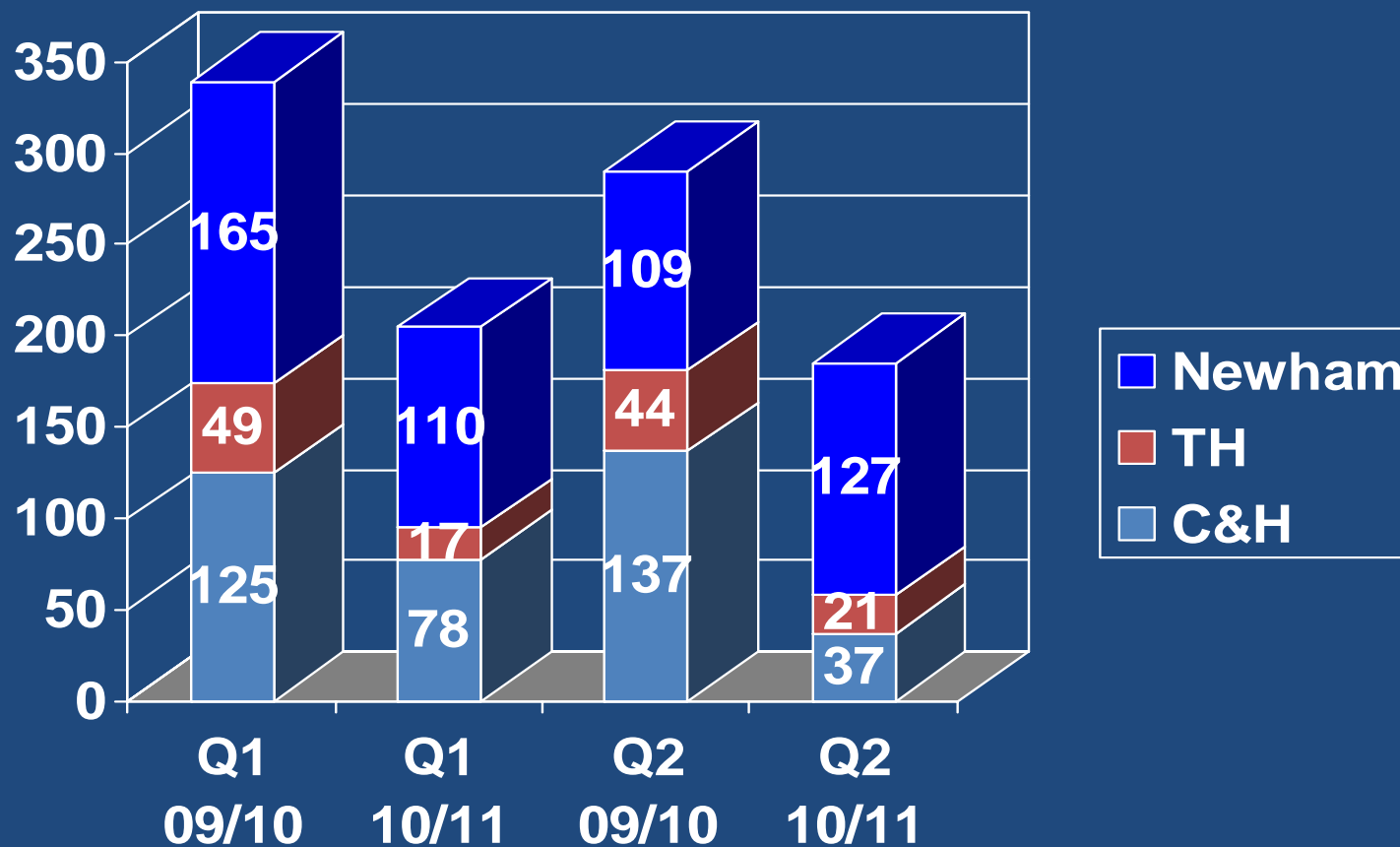
ISVA Interventions



Our challenge remains to gain the confidence and trust of off street sex workers so that they are able to report crimes against them

- During 2009 we began to see a considerable number of brothel closures by the police.
- However sex workers are resourceful and open flats again quickly, either in the same borough or in neighboring boroughs.
- What they did not necessarily do was let outreach services know where they had moved.
- As brothel closures became more frequent the numbers of flats we visited decreased and the situations in which we found women working has become more dangerous.
- The new buzz word in the industry is 'Independent escort' which basically means women doing more 'outcalls' or working from their own home.

334 individual off street clients in Q1&2



Some of the policing incidents being reported to us.....

'All brothels within a 3 mile radius of the Olympic site will be closed'
(Hackney Uniform)

'We know what you're doing here. Don't call the police again if you're still running this place as a brothel' Newham uniform after being called to remove a male behaving in a sexually aggressive manner and refusing to leave the woman's home.

'You can't run a brothel from here, and these women (the woman's daughters, both over 18 and visiting their mum with lunch) ***we want their names and addresses, you're running a brothel and you're going to have to close'*** Plain clothes officers to a Brazilian woman (legal) working from her own home.

And some of the things we know are happening

Women moving to different areas of London to continue sex working

A whole swathe of City flats that operate but move around and that we are unable to access

Where once the Police were accepted and in many cases welcomed by women who needed their help now they are distrusted, feared and avoided.

Weakening faith in NHS and other outreach institutions as women do not trust that we are not linked the Police.

- How do we support an already stigmatised and hidden community to report violence against them when government, policing and local policy continues to drive it underground?
- How do we ensure that migrant sex workers have access to the same public services as any other member of the community who experience violence and/or sexual assault?