



*Representations of women and girls' charitable organisations 2008 to 2020*

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**Representations of Women and Girls' Charitable Organisations**

**2008 to 2020**

**Lorna Dowrick**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Sheffield Hallam University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

**April 2023**

## Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.
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5. The word count of the thesis is 84,740.

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## **Abstract**

Using a feminist and post-structural framework, this thesis explores three representations of women and girls organisations (WGOs) between 2008 and 2020- from regulatory data, from government policy and finally, WGO documents. The differences between each representation were explored using a unique methodology that incorporates the 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' approach (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016) to demonstrate and critique the ways in which WGOs are constructed, represented and limited by the discourses of them and their work, and to assess the implications for gender equality.

The thesis makes a number of important contributions to knowledge. It problematises defining WGOs to illuminate the ways in which the boundaries of the definition are permeable and contested. In operationalising a definition of WGOs for the study, it also reflects on the methodological implications of category choices for the inclusion and exclusion of certain groups and organisations.

For the first time regulatory data has been used to advance empirical understanding of the size and shape of WGOs as a group. New knowledge has been generated about which particular kinds of WGO have experienced what types of changes in income, size and location. In the process it has created a dataset of organisations that can be used for further research, but also highlights the scope, complexity and limits of this knowledge.

The findings also highlight that discourses about WGOs are limited resulting in insufficient consideration of WGOs, their work and the women and girls they support. Important new questions about how and why WGOs are missing from broader voluntary and community sector (VCS) debates and are marginalised within VCS research are also raised. These findings are of particular importance in light of persistent gender inequality and concerns about the sustainability of WGOs.

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## **Abbreviations**

<b>BLM</b>	<b>Black Lives matter</b>
<b>OBMWG</b>	<b>Organisations for Black and Minoritised Women and Girls</b>
<b>SIB</b>	<b>Social Impact Bond</b>
<b>VCS</b>	<b>Voluntary and Community Sector</b>
<b>WEU</b>	<b>The Women and Equalities Unit</b>
<b>WGO</b>	<b>Women and Girl's Organisation</b>
<b>WI</b>	<b>Women's Institute</b>
<b>WiP</b>	<b>Women in Prison</b>
<b>WRC</b>	<b>Women's Resource Centre</b>

## **Chapter one: introduction**

### **1.1. Summary of the thesis**

Women and Girls Organisations (WGOs) have a fundamental role in providing important services, opportunities, and activities for women within a society in which gender inequality and its effects are both pervasive and systemic. Like much of the activity and roles that women undertake, the role and activities of WGOs are not widely recognised in society. This is also the case for academic research, where there has been a paucity of significant academic attention (Vacchelli 2015). There is limited research about WGOs either as a discreet group or within discussions or analysis of the wider sector. There is also therefore a lack of analysis of the ways in which WGOs and their work is represented and conceptualised and the impact on addressing gender inequality.

The year 2008 marked the start of a global economic crisis and in 2010 the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government began over 10 years of austerity policies in the UK. These austerity policies are known to have disproportionately affected women and girls (Women's Budget group 2017, 2019 and The Fawcett Society 2012a) and reports from WGOs indicate that there has been a corresponding negative effect on WGOs (Women's Resource Centre n.d. and Imkaan 2018). The onset of the COVID-19 crisis from late 2019 onwards created further significant disruption and uncertainty and affected the lives of women in different ways to those of men. Women predominantly took responsibility for education and childcare during lockdowns and suffered greater unemployment (Women's Budget Group 2020a, 2020b). They also faced barriers in accessing vital services for support with issues of gender-based violence (Davidge 2020, Magill 2022). Despite the heightened importance of gender during this period and the role of WGOs in supporting women, there is limited academic research examining what the impact on WGOs may be and the wider implications for gender equality goals.

It has also been suggested that research on the voluntary and community sector (VCS) is characterised by the limited use of critical approaches and methodologies (Corry & Taylor 2010; Coule et al. 2022) despite their capacity to offer important insight through a focus on power, domination and questioning

taken for granted assumptions. An analysis of WGOs requires an approach which has gender at its core, reflecting the importance of gender to WGOs and their work. This thesis therefore seeks to contribute to VCS research through a feminist approach to an under-researched group of organisations. The research uses a post-structural framework conceptualised as ‘three representations’. The three representations are a quantitative analysis of regulatory data, a documentary analysis of government policy and a documentary analysis of WGO literature. The use of representations is a novel methodology that provides a multi-dimensional view of WGOs from three distinct perspectives. The aim is to acknowledge and reflect on the different ways in which phenomena can be identified, categorised, and represented by different actors and in different discourses. The study explores WGOs and the changing landscape across the period 2008 to 2020, to contribute to knowledge about WGOs as a group, the different ways in which WGOs and their work is conceptualised and discussed, changes to the landscape of WGOs and the broader implications for gender equality.

The representations are discussed in relation to four key themes in this research: power, visibility, difference and intersectionality, and gender equality which are drawn from a feminist post-structural approach. This novel approach led to the formation of five specific research questions that this thesis addresses:

1. Who are the WGOs registered as charities in England and Wales between 2008 and 2018<sup>1</sup> and how are they represented in quantitative regulatory data?
2. How are WGOs and their work represented in Government policy between 2008 and 2020?
3. How do WGOs represent themselves, their work and the issues that are important to them between 2008 and 2020?
4. How do each of the above representations (questions 1,2,3) change over the time period?
5. What are the implications of these representations for gender equality?

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<sup>1</sup> Due to limitations of the regulatory data the quantitative analysis focuses on 2008 to 2018. This is explained further in chapter five.

The study makes several important contributions to knowledge. It engages with literature on the impact of the social, economic, and political environment including austerity policies and the COVID-19 crisis on women and the organisations that support them. The study also extends existing literature and debates about definition and classification of the VCS through examining the case of WGOs specifically and drawing particular attention to the benefits of a critical perspective to this process. To the researcher's knowledge this is the first time an identification of WGOs within Charity Commission data using a bespoke keyword search has been conducted. This is a method that can be replicated for further research and has been applied in a recent study (Damm et al. 2023). The first of three representations, provided by a quantitative analysis of the number, income, types, and location of WGOs that are registered charities between 2008 and 2018, generates new knowledge about the potential scope of a WGO sector and the range of organisations, services and activities. For many WGOs there is a shared history of common goals of promoting and working to eliminate gender inequalities, but the study also uncovers important differences and nuance, often reflecting the diversity in their origins, purposes, and values. The analysis contributes important knowledge about the different experiences for specific types of organisations working with women and girls, which has not previously been explored using quantitative data analysis.

The unique methodology of three representations contributes an alternate way to explore the VCS from a post-structural perspective. This is particularly useful when methods have been noted to have become more conservative and less critical (Coule et al. 2022). It reflects on how these representations relate to and shape a broader concept of gender equality and identifies the ways in which discourses about WGOs, their work and gender equality can be absent or limiting. This results in difficulties in the implementation of policies that have not considered the needs of WGOs and their work but also limits the discussion about broader gender equality goals.

Although this study has been focused on England and Wales, it is envisaged that the methods developed can be applied to additional datasets for further comparative study both in the UK and internationally and discussions about the nature, scope and representation of WGOs both within policy and by WGOs can

contribute to broader debates about the role and resourcing of these important organisations in an environment of persistent gender inequality.

## **1.2 Structure of the thesis**

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows. Chapter two discusses literature defining the VCS and the implications for WGOs. It provides a contextual overview of women and girls organisations and VCS-state relations prior to 2008. Chapter three details extant literature on WGOs and focuses on the period between 2008 and 2020 to identify where further research would be beneficial. Chapter four outlines the theoretical framework for the study and chapter five follows with an explanation of the research methodology and how it is operationalised. Chapters six, seven, and eight detail the findings of each of the three representations in turn – first the quantitative analysis, second the analysis of government policy documents and third the analysis of documents produced by WGOs. Chapter nine discusses in detail the findings in relation to the four themes of the research – power, visibility, difference and intersectionality, and gender equality. Finally, chapter ten offers summary conclusions, explaining the contribution to knowledge, noting the limitations of the study, and proposing avenues for further research.

## **Chapter two: Introducing the voluntary and community sector, women and girls organisations and VCS-state relations.**

This chapter introduces key terms used within this study and discusses their definitions. Importantly, this chapter recognises the contested nature of defining a VCS sector and extends this debate to definitions for Women and Girls Organisations (WGOs). The chapter starts with the voluntary and community sector as the wider sector within which WGOs are located. As there is a lack of research about historical WGO-state relations, as there is with VCS-state relations, it is useful to offer this wider context. Many of the key debates that arise about the wider sector are also relevant to WGOs.

This chapter contains four sections. First, an introduction to the key terms. Second, a review of approaches that attempt to define the VCS and their relevance to defining WGOs. The third section introduces WGOs and the fourth a summary of VCS-state relations and key developments for WGOs up to 2008.

### **2.1 Key terms**

Defining a space between profit-making organisations, the state and the individual/family has been the subject of significant and unresolved debate. A wide variety of descriptors, such as non-profit sector, third sector and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) have been used. Each descriptor highlights variation in how the space is defined and most importantly understood. It is necessary therefore to first define the space and specific approach used in this study.

Perhaps the broadest conception is that of civil society. This notion encompasses all the networks in society that exist in the space beyond individuals, the private sector and the state. The terms voluntary and community sector, charities, and third sector are perhaps used more interchangeably, and the differences are more difficult to discern. They are associated more specifically with the different organisations and groups in the space. The voluntary and community sector refers to organisations that have a level of formality of structure (such as a constitution or agreed rules) and who operate within the space between individuals, the state, and the private sector. The Third Sector is a term which



gained prominence under the UK's New Labour Government during a period of 'hyperactive mainstreaming' (Kendall 2009). The descriptor importantly refers to not just VCS organisations but also more hybrid organisations such as community enterprises that are businesses with a social purpose where profits are distributed to meet that purpose. The most specific term in the group is that of Charity. Charities in England and Wales relates to those organisations registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales. It is worth noting that there are also debates surrounding the types of organisations who can register as charities and whether they correspond with popular understanding of the term charity, for example, universities and private educational establishments.

In this study the term voluntary and community sector (VCS) is adopted which is commonly used by those who operate within the sector in the UK. Within this broader grouping of VCS organisations, this study focuses on first, Women and Girls Organisations (WGOs) and then in the quantitative analysis specifically WGOs that are registered with the Charity Commission. This is outlined in further detail in the methodology (chapter five).

WGOs can be conceived of as a sub-section of the wider VCS. However, the term WGO itself does not have a specific definition. While WGOs have been the subject of limited academic and non-academic debate this has often been conducted without an explicit definition of what a WGO is. For example, some WGOs have commonly used the term organisations 'by and for women' with an assumed understanding of what this may include, or research and commentary has been directed at a particular type of WGO such as organisations providing services to those affected by domestic abuse or sexual violence. Defining a WGO is therefore an important early step in this study.

As a sub-section of the VCS, debates about the VCS as a whole are also relevant to WGOs. In order to more comprehensively consider the issue of defining WGOs, it is important to take note of these wider discussions around definitions.

## **2.2 Defining the VCS and the implications for a women's and girls' sector.**

This section discusses key VCS theories that have been proposed in attempting to define the VCS sector. They include i) market and state failure, ii) a structural operational definition, iii) residual definitions, iv) comparative advantage and hybridity, and v) a contested field. The discussion is extended to include reflections on their specific relevance to defining WGOs.

### **i) Market and state failure**

Weisbrod proposed that the VCS can be seen in relation to notions of market and state failure. The concepts of market and state failure refer to the gaps in the provision of goods and services required in society by either the private for-profit sector or the state. It is proposed that the VCS developed in response to these gaps and to provide services which are needed but not necessarily provided at state level (Weisbrod 1977).

There are many WGOs that can be viewed as existing in response to failures by the market and the state to provide appropriate services. WGOs such as refuges that developed from the 1960s onwards identified and named a specific problem of violence against women and sought to offer services to safeguard those affected in an environment where the issue was not widely recognised as an issue and where there were no existing services to support women.

While attempting to illuminate the relationship between the three sectors, this concept only provides a partial view of VCS organisations. It does not account for the provision of social activity which comprises a significant proportion of VCS provision. Social groups and leisure activities for women and girls such as Women's institutes and Girlguiding account for significant numbers of WGOs.

### **ii) Structural-operational definition**

Salamon and Anheier identified five crucial structural or operational features to define the VCS. Such entities had to be:

1. "Organizations, i.e., institutionalized to some meaningful extent.
2. Private, i.e., institutionally separate from government.
3. Non-profit-distributing, i.e., not returning profits generated to their owners or directors.

4. Self-governing, i.e., equipped to control their own activities.
5. Voluntary, i.e., involving some meaningful degree of voluntary participation.” (Anheier and Salamon 2015, p216).

Although widely adopted in a range of academic literature on the VCS, this definition is based on an economic understanding of the sector, one that doesn't include the wide range of social benefits and opportunities that it can provide. It has been argued that it therefore doesn't fully capture what is distinctive about the VCS, in particular the role of public benefit (Toepler 2003; Nickel and Eikenberry 2016).

The National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), representing VCS organisations in England, outline six elements of a VCS organisation. They consist of the five above with the addition of a public benefit element stating:

“They have social objectives and work to benefit the community” (NCVO September 2021).

The definition is limited in scope by the exclusion of organisations who are not formal and yet may include a significant proportion of VCS organisations. This has been noted by those seeking a more encompassing definition of the VCS such as Billis (1993), Toepler (2003), Rochester (2013) and Soteri-Proctor et al. (2013).

Critiques that focus on the limits of an economic understanding of the VCS and that highlight the exclusion of less formal organisations would both also apply to WGOs. These organisations can have a social purpose element to their work and can also include WGOs who are focused on campaigning.

### **iii) Residual definition**

The residual definition describes the VCS in relation to what it is not. For example, the VCS can be defined by the fact that it is not the state, not the individual and not the private sector. As Corry notes:

“If something is ruled neither primarily by market logic nor via bureaucratic chain of command, it, must be part of the Third Sector” (Corry and Taylor 2010, p13).

Although it can be useful to consider what a concept is not, to gain clarity on what it may be, this view still leaves open the question of what it specifically is. As Gidron states:

“These terms accentuate the residual nature of that sector: negatively relating it to the other sectors suggests no independent roles and no unique ‘character’ of its own, in contradistinction with the ‘public’ or the ‘business’ sectors” (Gidron 2013, p304).

This approach feels unsatisfactory in not addressing what this ‘character’ of a VCS or a WGO may be. For WGOs being neither the state nor the public sector would not sufficiently capture the character of the organisations. As a starting point the addition of a focus on women as a primary purpose would also be needed.

#### **iv) Comparative advantage and hybridity**

Several theorists have proposed a less structured definition of the VCS that can accommodate its wide-ranging nature. Billis and Glennerster (1998) argued that third sector organisation can have comparative advantage over organisations from other sectors because of their “stakeholder ambiguity” and “ambiguous and hybrid structures” (Billis and Glennerster 1998, p81). Evers also considers this fluidity as important and developed the concept of a ‘tension field’:

“The third sector should be conceptualised as one dimension of the public space in civil societies i.e., as a tension field without clear boundaries where different rationales and discourses co-exist and intersect.” (Evers 1995, p161).

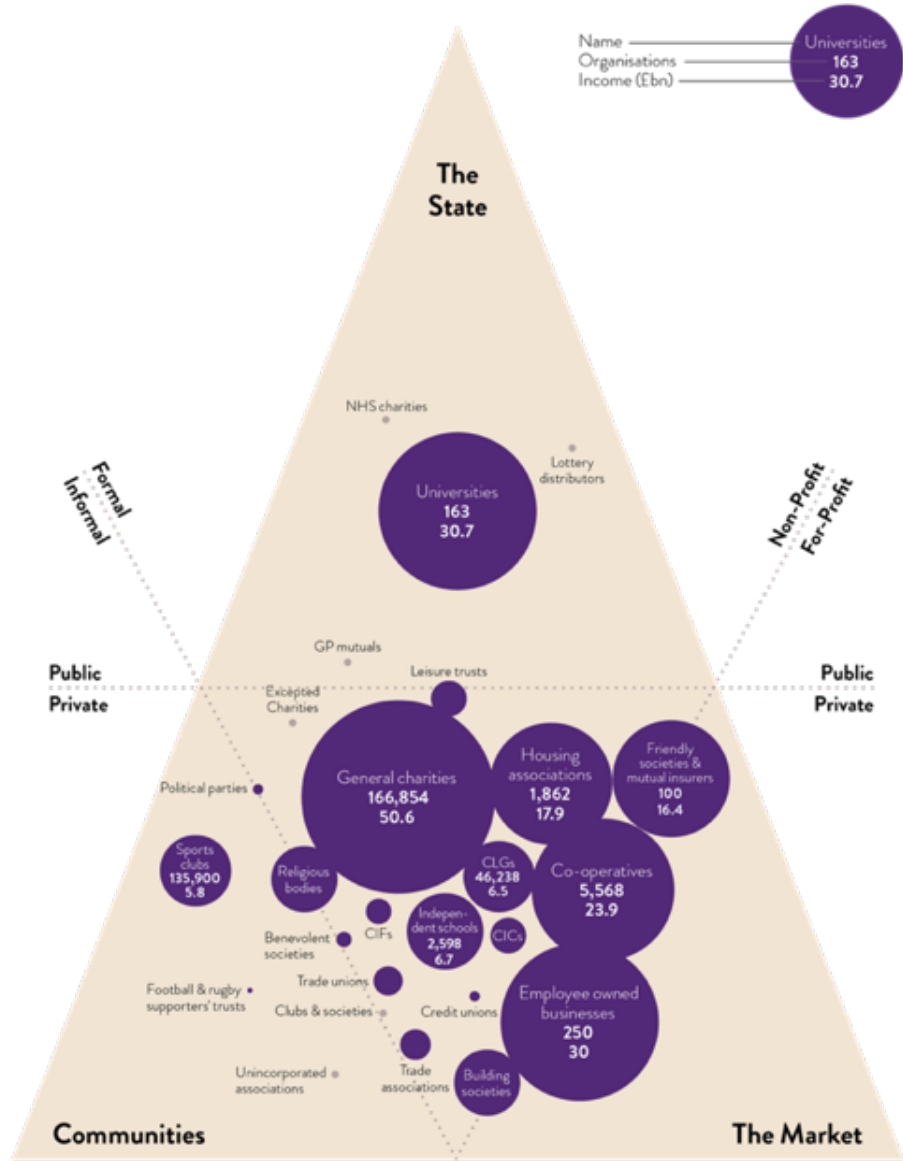
Brandsen et al., also highlight the centrality of hybridity to their understanding of the sector.

“Boundary problems, fuzziness and changeability may in fact be a defining characteristic of the sector...They could be classified...on the basis of how they cope with hybridity and change.” (Brandsen et al. 2005, p750).

Based on a model developed by Pestoff (1992) and developed by Evers and Laville (2004), the diagram in figure one below conceptualises the space between

the three ‘poles’ using data from NCVO’s 2019 Civil Society Almanac.<sup>2</sup> It illustrates the complexity of the space and a ‘spectrum’ approach where some organisations may be closer to one or other of the poles than others and more or less formal in their nature.

**Figure one: NCVO 2019 Civil Society Almanac Model**



Source: <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/profile/voluntary-sector-definition/>

All these models focus on the hybrid and fluid nature of the VCS in recognition that organisations may exist as more or less close to the state or the market and

<sup>2</sup> The Almanac is an annual production by the NCVO which provides details of the size and scope of the sector.

may be more or less formal in their structure. In so doing they can better accommodate the range of types of VCS organisation, and their relative positions to the other sectors. This would also apply to WGOs which can operate in differing relationships to the other sectors with differing levels of formality and focus on profit generation.

**v) A contested field**

A more fluid understanding of the nature of the VCS is developed in field theory approaches to the VCS. Macmillan proposes that instead of a single 'sector' the VCS is viewed as a field of organisations that are subject to continual flux and "fuzzy and permeable boundaries" (2013, p50).

"It may be more appropriate, as an empirical representation, to abandon the idea of a singular 'sector'. An alternative notion, drawn from Bourdieu, which is likely to be more fruitful, is the idea of the third sector as a contested 'field', with fuzzy and permeable boundaries...In this view, the third sector becomes an arena where actors have some sense of fluid but common association, affiliation, and orientation." (Macmillan 2013, p50).

This definitional work is therefore ongoing and in movement. As Bourdieu states:

"Groups such as social classes, are *to be made* (emphasis in original)." (Bourdieu 1989 ,p18).

As Macmillan also notes alongside this association and affiliation are rules and norms. In this way, WGOs themselves have a key role in managing the boundaries, rules and accepted behaviours of what constitutes a WGO in practice, in both 'positive' (through affiliation and links between organisations) and in 'negative' ways (through managing boundaries).

Alcock (2010) identifies a 'strategic unity' within the VCS as a means for actors to present a homogenous VCS seeking resources and alliances with the state. Both Alcock (2010) and Macmillan (2013) highlight that defining a sector is a political process, necessarily imbued with issues of power relations between groups and as such we need to consider who is involved in defining, how decisions are made and what purpose is served by the definition.

These important reflections can be extended to WGOs and the definitional work of identifying a WGO, how the role of a WGO is conceptualised and by whom. An examination of any ‘boundary keeping’ or ways in which boundaries are created or resisted by WGOs or other actors in such a disparate sector will also be important in examining the ways in which WGOS are represented in this study.

Overall, it is important to avoid overly simplistic representations. As Alcock suggests there is an ongoing interaction between the state, sector and other interested parties which creates:

“a particular constellation of interests and alliances within the context of a developing broader policy regime, focused on a particular vision of a mixed economy of welfare.” (Alcock 2010).

The field approach has more applicability in relation to encapsulating the way in which sub-sectors within the VCS are fluid. The approach can therefore better account for change within the sector than definitions focused on a list of static defining features. It also focuses on power dynamics within the VCS, the state and elsewhere in actively shaping what the VCS is but is more difficult to apply in quantitative research where static categories are often required. This notion of a more fluid and power-focused approach is taken forward in this study to support the development of a definition of WGOs and where static definitions are required, the ambiguities, dynamics and differences are noted.

### **2.3 Defining WGOs**

Defining a WGO has not been the subject of any identified extant research. Literature which includes WGOs has tended to focus on particular ‘types’ of women’s organisation based on the services they provide such as those that support people affected by domestic abuse or sexual violence (Towers and Walby 2012, Adisa et al. 2020) or specific organisations such as Women’s Institutes (Andrews 2015). Literature from WGOs also rarely specifies what this constitutes. The Women’s Resource Centre have been one exception by outlining women and girls organisations as organisations ‘led by and for women’ (Women’s Resource Centre 2023), whilst others have chosen to describe

organisations by the work that they do (National Alliance of Women's Organisations 2023, Rosa 2023):

“We root our support in the women's and girls' organisations working closely in communities. They're the ones campaigning to secure equal representation for women in politics and public life and working to end violence against women and girls. They're advocating for better access to healthcare and pushing for economic stability.” (Rosa 2023).

There is an important gap therefore in defining a WGO. The first question to consider is why identify women's organisations within the broader context of the VCS? There are three main points here, first; in addition to the discussion above, Halfpenny and Reid (2002) suggest that the VCS is far too vast to study as a single entity. Second, it has also been noted that it is so diverse a grouping, that for many organisations identification as a grouping within the sector may be more important in some instances. As Macmillan identifies:

“Practitioners are likely to identify more closely with the core activities of the organisations within which they work and associate any broader allegiances with this mission...” (Macmillan 2013).

Consideration of a more specific grouping within the wider VCS may therefore prove helpful in developing our understanding of the sector, in terms of focusing on a particular 'type' of organisation and how this may reflect on or inform our understanding of the wider sector. It may reveal nuance and difference that is not visible at a whole sector level. That is not to suggest that consideration of one 'type' of organisation will necessarily lead to direct parallels with all organisations within the sector, on the contrary, the sector is so diverse that this is unlikely to be the case, but it may give indications of features that are important to consider.

The third and most compelling reason is that WGOs are an important and specific grouping within the VCS. They have a unique history and development and meet important needs for women and wider society. It was noted above that one of the key aspects of the VCS is its wider public benefit and similarly it is useful to understand and recognise the contribution of WGOs. For those organisations in the VCS that are focused on challenging and addressing inequality such as WGOs, a failure to be seen or noticed can reinforce this inequality. This is in



terms of loss of opportunity to secure resources to address inequality but also as a force for amplifying the voice of those affected by inequality. Ware acknowledged parallel issues for VCS organisations for Black and minoritised communities:

“There is also a debate as to whether there is a BME VCS and, if there is, what its identifying features are (Mayblin and Soteri- Proctor 2011). The consequences are that specific issues affecting BME organisations and the communities that they represent, for example higher levels of youth unemployment, are unaddressed, and their influence on generic concerns in society is disproportionately marginalised (Afridi and Warmington 2009; Craig 2011).” (Ware 2013, p3).

Similarly, if there is no knowledge of what exists then it is difficult to account for growth or loss of organisations, seek recognition and if appropriate take relevant action. Increasing visibility therefore is part of a wider strategy for acknowledgement, value, and resourcing. However, recognising the potential utility of defining and making a sector visible, also needs to be understood as a process imbued with power and contestation. This has been articulated in a range of previous research (Appe 2012; Bowker & Star 1999; Nickel & Eikenberry 2016 and LePere-Schloop et al. 2022). Prior to identifying, and categorising organisations, it is important to raise critical questions, namely what is being identified, who is identifying, how and for what purpose?

While there may be some common notion of which organisations are a WGO, there is also likely to be considerable contestation about the boundaries of the term and what is included as a WGO. Appe also reflected in her research that different mappers will map different things based on their own objectives and will:

“therefore “discover” very different civil society realities.” (Appe 2019, p19).

In terms of ‘how’ or what tools we use to map, as we are only able to map what is captured in formal data collection, we are unable to capture *all* organisations. Smith described this as ‘flat earth’ approaches to mapping the non-profit sector (Smith 1997) where mapping is carried out in a way that captures what is available and not what is known to exist. This is also problematic in this study when it is known that there are many organisations that could be included as

WGOs but which are not registered and their details are therefore not readily available. This issue is acknowledged and developed further in Chapter five.

Another important consideration in any mapping project is ‘for what purpose is the mapping being done?’, as increased visibility can be an issue of control:

“Enabling the efficiency of surveillance (Foucault 1995)” (Nickel and Eikenberry 2016, p 401).

A tension can therefore be identified between rendering, in this case WGOs, more visible and subject to increased attention (with the potential to attract increased resources and recognition) and that of increased visibility (leaving organisations open to control). This tension is explored further within this study through the theme of visibility, which is introduced in the theoretical framework (chapter four) and threads through the study.

As no clear definition currently exists, defining a WGO for this study is the first stage in the quantitative analysis outlined in chapter five and the implications of this definition are discussed in chapter nine.

## **2.4 Section summary**

This section of the study has highlighted that defining a VCS is contentious, with a range of possible definitional approaches that highlight differing features of the VCS. Definitions can also be bound up in normative assumptions about what the VCS is perceived to be, should be and its independence from the other arenas of the state and private sector. Definitions also change according to social, political, and economic context and the agents with power to lead the discourse on the topic. These same ambiguities and difficulties can also be applied to many of the sub-sectors within the wider VCS, in this case WGOs. These complexities have not been adequately explored in detail in existing research on WGOs. This study therefore seeks to explore these issues further through establishing a working definition of a WGO, operationalising this definition for the analysis of the three representations and reflecting on the consequences and issues raised for WGOs and broader gender equality goals.

To understand the nature of WGOs as a discrete group and their place within a wider VCS, it is important to broadly understand the historical development of these organisations, to which the discussion now turns.

## **2.5 Women and girls organisations in England and Wales**

This section provides a summary of the main points of development for WGOs. 'Waves' of feminism is used here as a guide to UK WGOs and feminist activity from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century to 2008.

### **2.5.1 An overview of WGOs from mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards**

Excluded from the vote and mainstream politics, wealthier women in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century became increasingly involved in charitable work. Charities offered opportunities for women from wealthier backgrounds, to leave the home, pursue interests and develop skills in new areas, as long as they were in keeping with expectations of their nurturing roles (Anderson and Zinsser 1988; INTRAC 2013). Women were primarily concerned with issues of social justice and they joined and established organisations dominated by welfare concern, these were often founded on a religious basis. A number of researchers have for example outlined the involvement of women in campaigns for the abolition for slavery (Olusoga 2018; Ware 2015). Ware also warns however that:

“Having made these connections it is important not to idealise them and to recognise that they have emerged or disappeared depending on whether or not they were useful to the women making them at the time.” (Ware 2015, p239).

While Ware states that the involvement in abolition campaigns may have contributed to increased awareness of their own circumstances in relation to White males, it was largely conducted by wealthier women (Ware 2015). Banks focused their research on the role of working-class women in the trade union movement and noted the similarities to the part played by middle class women in such social reform campaigns (Banks 1982).

New organisations for campaigning for women's suffrage were established, such as the Fawcett Society (originally London National Society for Women's Suffrage) formed in 1866 and the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903. The Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG) established in 1883, the National council of

women (originally National Union of Women Workers) in 1895 were also all founded during this period.

In terms of social clubs, Doughan and Gordan (2009) identify the rise of women's clubs in connection with travel to urban centres by middle- and upper-class women for leisure and shopping and the need for access to safe spaces to rest and meet. Later women's clubs with more feminist purposes and engagement with campaigning and political discussions developed in the period. Conversely, clubs for girls were established largely by wealthier women for 'respectable' working class girls where:

"Refinement was a major item on the agenda. The girls basically needed to be rescued from the presumed vices of their parent's culture, especially gambling, sexual immorality, music halls and above all the Demon Drink." (Doughan and Gordan 2009, p94-95).

After the first world war however, there was an increased commitment by girls' clubs to develop activities more in line with the girls' interests. In 1915 the Women's Institutes began to be set-up supported by the Agricultural Organisation Society and the post of Voluntary County Organiser. The institutes were represented nationally by the National Federation of Women's Institutes which took over from government sponsorship. While explicitly independent from political parties, Doughan and Gordon detail attacks from both the left on the conservatism of the groups and the right for their 'subversive radicalism'. (Doughan and Gordon 2009). Rotary clubs also developed at this time and explicitly excluded women. Ladies' committees however began to be established linked to some clubs which led to the creation of Inner wheel clubs for women connected to rotary clubs in 1924. The right to vote for women over 21 was finally granted in 1928 leading to a decline in first wave feminism and women's organisations stabilised.

The Women's Voluntary Service was formed in 1938 just prior to the start of the Second World War in 1939 and took a prominent role in supporting the war effort. Following the end of the second world war in 1945 and the Beveridge report of 1942, several key gains for women were able to be negotiated in the new post-war settlement, notably the 1944 Education Act and 1945 Family Allowances Act

while also benefitting from the wider social reforms such as universal health care. In the 1950s calls for change for women became less frequent.

A range of organisations many of whom are still in operation today have their roots in these periods. Not all organisations were progressive or feminist in nature, many were conservative and others were specifically non-party political. Early organisations were established by wealthier women 'for the benefit' of working-class women but the beneficiaries had little say in what was offered (McCarthy, 2008). Others however such as The Fawcett Society were campaigning organisations seeking to improve the position of women in society and specifically gain the vote. Improvements in women's lives through gains after the second world war are largely thought to be responsible for a decline in campaign work that followed.

### **2.5.2 Second wave feminism**

Goss and Skocpol (2006) examined the nature of women's organisations over time in the US. Their research highlights the shift in organisations from those with a broader social welfare outlook to those focused specifically on 'women's issues' such as reproductive rights. This was echoed in the UK in the second wave feminist women's movements of the 1960s to 1980s that added to many of the first wave organisations that continued to exist.

Renewed interest in the position of women in society and in key issues such as access to abortion, domestic violence, equal pay, childcare and education led to the creation of many new organisations 'by women and for women' at this time (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Dominelli 2019). Many were inspired by the civil rights movement and liberation movements in Africa and Asia in the 1960s (Mama 1996; Ware 2015).

Notably, 1974 saw the opening of the first women's refuge in Chiswick and the establishment of Women's Aid. As Weldon and Htun note, women's organisations were the ones who identified and defined the concept of violence against women:

"Women organising to advance women's status defined the very concept of violence against women, raised awareness of the issue, and put it on

national and global policy agendas (Weldon 2002, 2006).” (Weldon and Htun 2013, p238).

In the 1970s and 1980s feminists also played significant roles in environmental campaign groups such as Greenpeace and the Green political parties (Anderson and Zinsser 1988, p43). The Greenham common women’s peace movement (1980 to 2000) deepened connections between women and the environment and demonstrated “effective collective egalitarian organising” (Dominelli 2019). Organisations by and for Black and minoritised women and girls in the UK were also established at this time, to provide space to organise around their own priorities and concerns. This included prominent organisations such as the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD) in 1978 and Southall Black Sisters in 1979 (Bryan et al. 2018; Mama 1996). Sudbury also reminds us that while these are better documented organisations, other less well-known organisations were also active in large urban centres in the midlands and North of England during this period (Sudbury 1998).

OWAAD, the first Black women’s organisation to organise at a national level became a catalyst for Black women’s organisations to be established on a large scale in most major cities (Sudbury 1998). Black lesbian women’s groups also sought an autonomous voice with the first national conference in 1985 and the establishments of groups from the mid-80s onwards. Section 28 of the Local government Act 1988 however led to funding cuts and the hostile environment led some groups to cease (Sudbury 1998).

The election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and the pursuit of a neo-liberal economic agenda with a decreased role for the state was associated with the New Public Management discourse dominating the 1980s (Hood and Dixon 2015). This prioritised efficiency and effectiveness, and the role of voluntary organisations as potential alternative providers to state welfare in a marketized and mixed economy of provision. Sudbury notes several concerns and shifts for Black women’s organisations at this time including funding needs, maintaining independence and a shift from political activism to service delivery (Sudbury 1998). Many of these concerns persist today both for WGOs and the wider VCS.

For example, an observation by Mama from 1996 from research with Black and minoritised women's organisations in London, still resonates today:

"The urgent problems facing refuges and all the women they serve, as a result of recent legislation and cutbacks in public resources present the most serious challenge to its survival that the refuge movement has had to face" (Mama 1996, p272).

Second wave feminism was an era in which a significant number of WGOs were established, notably the refuges, rape crisis organisations, the Greenham Common Women's Peace organisation, and organisations for Black and minoritised women and girls. While there was a period of intense activity and campaigning, there remained issues of insufficient investment such as the lack of refuge spaces. The election of the Conservative government in 1979 established a period of decline and reduced state investment in line with the neo-liberal economic policies of the time.

### **2.5.3 Third wave feminism**

From the early to mid 1990s onwards a third wave of feminism emerged with a greater questioning of 'gender' as a category and increased plurality within the movement as the theories of intersectionality and gender performativity became more widely influential. The rise in 'identity politics' to distinguish between different forms of disadvantage became popular although it was also criticised for creating division within the feminist movement and as Fraser notes became increasingly used as a 'derogatory synonym' for feminism and other movements (Fraser 1997, p113).

Griffin (2005) introduces the book entitled 'feminist activism in the 1990s' with the proclamation that:

"The good news first: feminist activism is alive and well in the 1990s" (2005, p1)

but this is soon followed by recognition that a number of key difficulties characterised the time for WGOs:

“a discontent with the present, and possibly the past; a desire for improvement in the future; and a (self) questioning in the face of struggle.” (Griffin 2005, p1).

In the UK, the election of the New Labour government in 1997 with a focus on communitarianism and the ‘third way’ paved the way for increased involvement of the VCS. A compact with the VCS was launched in 1998. A period of ‘hyperactive mainstreaming’ of the VCS ensued (Kendall 2009) but this was also criticised as an attempt by government to increase the ‘governable terrain’ as more attention and new definitions of the VCS as a wider third sector encompassed a broader range of organisations (Carmel and Harlock 2008). There was an increased emphasis on public services commissioning the VCS to deliver services, which was accompanied by concerns about the effects of isomorphism (Di Maggio and Powell 1983) as increased state engagement via contracting was feared to be changing the nature of the VCS and its independence (Millbourne and Cushman 2015, Egdell and Dutton 2017). A range of capacity-building funds were introduced, some were to support the sector to move toward contracting with the state.

There were hopes for a more feminist agenda with a higher representation of women in Cabinet and Parliament under the Blair government and the creation of the Women’s Unit (later called the Women and Equalities Unit). There were positive policy developments for women during this time mainly in the introduction of tax credits, childcare and domestic violence legislation in The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act of 2004 (Squires and Wickham-Jones 2004). The WEU itself however was ultimately criticised for a lack of action on addressing gender equality (Squires and Wickham-Jones 2004; Annesley et al. 2010).

Weldon’s research identifies that the effects of autonomous organising by women are critical for gender equality. She argues that they are more important for influencing progressive policy change than:

“The presence of women legislators, the impact of political parties, or national wealth. Autonomous feminist organising ensures that words become deeds.” (Weldon 2013, p245-246).



It is critical therefore that there is continued space for autonomous WGOs to thrive and represent themselves and their work.

#### **2.5.4 Fourth wave feminism**

A fourth wave feminism broadly understood as developing from 2012 onwards has been in progress. Munro (2013) highlights fourth wave feminism as inextricably linked to the rise in internet use as a means of activism. Certainly #metoo and the everyday sexism project (Bates 2015) have been very prominent examples of mobilising women in this way. Fourth wave feminism also builds on the notion of intersectionality and a challenge of gender binaries with more emphasis on supporting people who identify with a marginalised gender identity.

#### **2.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter has highlighted the lack of a specific definition of a WGO. It has drawn parallels with the discussions about defining the wider VCS but noted the nuanced issues for WGOs as a sub-sector within the VCS. Historically, there have been differing degrees of proximity and forms of relationship, depending on the nature of the Government in control, which have been accompanied by debates about maintaining independence from the state and the 'appropriate' role for the VCS in delivering services. The chapter has also introduced the issue of visibility which is developed further in this study.

An overview of the development of WGOs has also been provided. It has highlighted their unique history and development that has led to the kinds of organisations that are prevalent today. Through a summary of the development of women's organisations it is possible to identify that in organising at first for the benefits of others and broader social welfare, women in the VCS have been able to create spaces to develop their own agendas. For example, the second wave feminist organisations were strongly rooted in challenging structural inequality beyond traditional gender roles and many of these organisations remain central to the sector today. This work has been ongoing over significant periods of time where issues of adequate support and resourcing have also been raised. During the late 1990s and 2000s, significant advances were made in areas such as childcare, working tax credits and domestic violence legislation and new organisations and groups of women continue to form. The internet has in more

recent years become a key site for feminist organising and campaigning in a 'fourth wave' of feminism. Overall, this chapter has highlighted the importance of WGOs for articulating and organising around specific concerns and the varied nature of their development over time often in response to broader social, economic, and political changes.

## **Chapter three: Women and Women and Girls Organisations (WGOs) from 2008 to 2020.**

The role and position of women and girls' organisations (WGOs), as with other voluntary and community sector organisations, can only be fully understood in a context of wider social and economic events, crises, and cultural shifts. This chapter introduces a number of key issues and developments that have characterised the 2008 to 2020 period. It presents the development of the Big Society agenda, austerity policies, global campaigns, and movements such as #metoo, Black Lives Matter and the climate crisis followed by the COVID-19 public health crisis. In the process of providing an overview of these key events, the chapter reviews existing research and commentary about the implications for women and WGOs and highlights areas where current knowledge is low. It concludes with how this thesis seeks to contribute to our understanding of WGOs in this period.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. First the ideas of Big Society and localism are introduced as important policy initiatives of the period. Second, austerity is discussed in detail as a significant context to the landscape of 2008 to 2020. The chapter defines and introduces austerity as a concept, considers the impact of austerity on women, the impact of austerity on VCS organisations and the specific implications for WGOs and specialist WGOs. Third, the chapter provides an overview of key protests and campaigns from 2008 to 2020 and fourth it considers the emergent literature on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

### **3.1 Big Society and Localism**

The financial crisis of 2008 was followed in 2010 by the formation of a new Coalition government led by David Cameron. Cameron identified a key role for the VCS and volunteering in the 'Big Society' and the possibility for further increased involvement in public services. The Big Society concept was a flagship agenda for the government and was planned to "put more power and opportunity into people's hands" with "citizens, communities and local governments" being passed the "power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face and build the Britain they want" (Cabinet Office 2010, p1). Sitting alongside announcements for austerity policies that significantly reduced

investment in public services, the Big Society was criticised for being part of a broader agenda of shifting responsibility from the government to local communities to address reduced service provision. Corbett and Walker described it as “a rhetorical fig-leaf for socially corrosive neo-liberalism” (Corbett and Walker 2013, p468).

As noted by Levitas, this proposal would particularly disadvantage women, as they occupy more of the roles in the community and family spheres and will be the ones required to take on more of the labour (Levitas 2012). Furthermore, the proposal was also criticised for failing to address the inequalities in resources and power in communities to be able to implement such a scheme (Corbett and Walker 2013; Gedalof 2013).

The Big Society was rooted in a broader concept of ‘localism’. Big Society was relatively short-lived and became eclipsed by the broader impact of austerity and the prevailing broader localism agenda. Localism represents a shift of power and responsibility to a local level and away from a central government role.

“The Department of Communities and Local government defined localism as lifting the burden of bureaucracy, empowering communities to do things their way and diversifying the delivery of public services” UK government policy definition of localism.” (Department of Communities and Local Government 2010, p3).

‘Lifting the burden of bureaucracy’ alluded to what was deemed as unnecessary administrative systems created under the previous New Labour governments. These were to be removed to ‘free up’ communities to take on their new role. While decentralisation and the diversification of public service delivery were features of New Labour governments, the Coalition government’s localism agenda sought to increase decentralisation to a more micro level and within a framework of extensive cuts to government provision. Lowndes and Pratchett (2012) identified localism as part of a broader project of the ‘hollowing out’ of the state under a neo-liberal agenda. Dagdeviren et al., demonstrate how localism was used to frame the growth of foodbanks as:

“Community agency in action... thereby justifying further cost-containment.” (2019, p151)

rather than a sign of crisis and poverty, and a questionable role for the VCS.

Jupp (2021) elaborates further to describe how localism was felt as loss at community level, while Clayton et al., similarly describe a process of:

“Social and spatial distancing between third sector organisations and local decision makers, between organisations and their service users and also across the sector itself.” (Clayton et al. 2016, p723).

This is at odds with the desired ‘power and opportunities’ for local communities that was stated. While research has detailed the impact of Big Society and Localism on the VCS in general, there is a paucity of instances of academic research on how they specifically relate to WGOs.

### **3.2 An introduction to austerity**

As a defining ideology driven policy environment of the era, austerity has formed a consistent backdrop to the VCS and WGO context between 2008 and 2020 and has had considerable implications for women and the organisations that support them. As such, austerity is discussed at greater length in this section.

Austerity was introduced as a government policy by the Coalition Government led by David Cameron in 2010. Austerity can be defined as:

“A period of fiscal discipline in which governments make significant cuts to public expenditure as a means of reducing public debt. The principal idea underpinning austerity is that governments, by cutting expenditure, will encourage more private consumption and business investment and therefore more sustainable economic growth.” (Cooper and Whyte 2017, p5).

Up until the COVID-19 crisis, austerity has led to a reduction in the state, particularly since 2010, through reduced welfare expenditure and local government budgets accompanied by increased levels of privatisation. It was the collapse of the Lehman brothers in 2008 that triggered a banking crisis resulting in the bailouts of banks at sums of at least £550 billion in the UK, in 2008 and 2009 (Seymour 2014, p116). The debt accrued through the bailout was transferred to the public books and a resultant debt crisis dominated the

economic and political agenda as a financial crisis in the banking sector became reframed as a crisis of public spending.

Austerity commentators have argued that it is not simply a matter of dealing with the debt, austerity should be understood in more broad terms and in line with the discussions above, as an extension of a neo-liberal policy to reduce the state (Cooper and Whyte 2017; O' Hara 2017; Seymour 2014; Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011). With a focus on cuts to public expenditure and increased freedom for private organisations, austerity has a natural fit within the neo-liberal framework of economics. If an over-extended state can be blamed for the crisis, then it provides justification for rapid reductions in state spending and further pursuit of neo-liberal policy. Austerity has in effect:

“Opened the door to going quicker and harder, but we might guess that we were going that way already.” (Bhattacharyya 2018, p2298).

The cuts have also not been evenly distributed across government provision. Half of the cuts have been targeted at the welfare system and local government while central government has ‘remained relatively unscathed’ (Cooper and Whyte 2017).

The notion of austerity as a significantly flawed policy solution is widely held, (Krugman, 2012; Stiglitz 2017; Blyth 2013; Boyer 2012). Austerity policy was justified on the grounds that we cannot afford to spend, yet if there is a lack of public spending in the economy, then there is a corresponding lack of growth. Indeed, both John Quiggin (in Blyth 2013) and Krugman (2017) have described austerity as belonging to “zombie economics” - an economic policy which should have died due to its inapt nature but is nonetheless repeatedly resurrected.

The disproportionate impact of austerity policies on people and places who lack economic resources and are most disadvantaged has been noted by a wide range of commentators (O'Hara 2017; Blyth 2013; Cooper and Whyte 2017, Armstrong 2017; Dorling 2015; Shildrick 2018). Welfare reform has included increasingly more punitive approaches to encouraging work and penalising those who are unable to work through changes to the Disability Living Allowance, the introduction of Personal Independence Payments, the introduction of the

bedroom tax, the use of benefits sanctions and workfare schemes. This is coupled with decreased funding to local authorities which impacts on local support provision such as emergency funds and social care provision and has been accompanied by the increased privatisation of services.

Austerity policies have increased hardship for many and has increased inequalities through a reduction in income and services for the less well-off and a reduction in taxes for higher earners (Cooper and Whyte 2017).

### **3.3. Austerity and women**

Gender is a key determinant in the impact of austerity and austerity has been demonstrated to disproportionately affect women (Karamessini and Rubery 2013, Nunn 2016, Women's budget group 2019). Women are more likely to be less affluent than men; rely on the social care system, work in social care and the public sector and to pick up the reduced care support needs of family and neighbours. They are also more likely to be in insecure and low paid employment (Shildrick 2018). This has made them particularly affected by the focus of the cuts on areas such as welfare and local authority expenditure (Armstrong 2017; Ginn 2013; Pearson 2019).

“Women are increasingly treated as an expandable and costless resource that can absorb all the extra work that results from cuts to the resources that sustain life.” (Pearson 2019, p1).

While women are impacted by the practical and immediate implications of reduced income and increased caring responsibilities, there are also important implications for reinforcing gender roles of caring and reduced employment which impact on longer term and broader gender equality goals (Karmessini and Rubery 2013).

Furthermore, not all women are affected equally by austerity measures. Evidence to date confirms that for women facing additional disadvantages the effects are even more significant. For example, Rabindrakumar (2013), Armstrong (2017), Ginn (2013) and Cain (2016) have all highlighted the severe impact of benefits changes on lone parents, who are estimated to be approximately 86% women (Dromey et al. 2020).

Cooper & Whyte (2017), extensive work by Ryan (2019) and campaign groups for disability rights such as Sisters of Frida (Jacobs et al. 2020) have all reported the overwhelming evidence of the negative impact of welfare reforms on disabled welfare claimants:

“The centre for welfare reform calculated that disabled people would endure nine times the burden of cuts compared to the average citizen, with people with the most severe disabilities being hit a staggering nineteen times harder.” (Ryan 2019, p19).

Nor have the cuts been evenly distributed across geographical areas (Beatty and Fothergill 2014; Cooper and Whyte 2017; and Hastings et al. 2015). The disproportionate impact of austerity on the lives of women from Black and minoritised backgrounds due to persistent structural inequalities that intersect with the impact of austerity has also been noted (The Women’s Budget Group 2017; Corbett et al. 2013).

Overall, the gendered impact of austerity policies is particularly notable and important for this study. It has caused widespread hardship particularly for many women. For women who face multiple disadvantages, the impact of austerity policies can be multi-layered and compounding, as the effects of multiple policy changes to welfare, layer over existing disadvantages and are magnified by them. This context of increased inequality and hardship is of relevance to WGOs who are often the frontline organisations supporting women and girls in these circumstances.

### **3.4 Austerity, the VCS and WGOs**

WGOs operate within the broader VCS and as such an analysis of the impact on the VCS is relevant to WGOs. Yet WGOs are in addition a discrete element within the VCS and have been impacted in specific ways because of the gendered nature of austerity policies and it is important to also explore this further. WGOs as a group, have historically not received a significant amount of academic attention (Vacchelli 2015) and are rarely included in analysis of the sector in studies that breakdown the sector by sub-type. This section therefore first discusses the wider impact on VCS organisations before pursuing a more



detailed understanding of the impact on WGOs and then specialist WGOs in particular.

#### **3.4.1 Austerity and the VCS**

Jones et al. (2016) drawing on work by Kane et al. (2014) notes that the VCS itself has been disproportionately affected by cuts in relation to all spending cuts across government between 2010/11 and 2011/12. It is perhaps unsurprising given the discussion above in relation to location, that austerity for VCS organisations has also been subject to geographical divisions. Clifford (2012) and Clifford et al. (2013) noted that less deprived local areas had a higher prevalence of VCS organisations, but that certain kinds of organisations are more prevalent in more deprived local areas. These are organisations classified by the International Classification of Non Profit Organisations (ICNPO) as working in the area of ‘economic well-being’ and reflecting the types of organisations that receive public funding. Organisations working in less affluent areas *and* with disadvantaged groups are particularly likely to receive some public funding. These may therefore be at greater risk from austerity cuts. Jones et al. warned that the likely impact of such cuts will be increased ‘voluntary failure’ in areas where the need is the greatest (Jones et al. 2016).

Jayanetti (2011) notes that the cuts to spending are in opposition to the encouragement of VCS organisations in service delivery as a feature of the Big Society. This is also highlighted by Civil exchange quoted in Corbett and Walker (2013) who identify that:

“The first audit of the big society estimates that £3.3 billion of public funding will be cut from the voluntary sector by 2015/16 (Civil Exchange, 2012)...Of particular relevance to the big society agenda is that small organizations (working with 1–4 councils) were much harder hit than larger ones (20 plus councils): three times as many had experienced cuts of 10 per cent or more in their council funding in 2010–11.” (Corbett and Walker 2013).

It is not just organisations within low-income areas that are most affected therefore, there are also intersections with size of organisation as an important factor in how austerity affects VCS organisations:

“The smallest relative declines in income have been for the largest charities...In contrast, there have been particularly significant declines in income – of 16 per cent and 17 per cent respectively between 2008 and 2014 – for small to medium sized charitable organisations with annual incomes of between £10k and £100k and between £100k and £1m...reflecting the particular vulnerability of mid-sized charities, more likely to be involved in service delivery and to be dependent on local authority funding.” (Clifford 2017, p23).

VCS studies of the impact of austerity, have been predominantly qualitative, offering real insight at a close level but less able to demonstrate the large-scale picture across a range of organisations. Quantitative studies such as Mohan et al. (2018) and Clifford (2017) have provided analysis across large datasets and over significant periods of time that can demonstrate scale very effectively. Data can, however, be presented as though it is ‘fact’ and without recognition of the constructed nature of knowledge where phenomena can be operationalised in different ways to different effects by different researchers. For example, Mohan et al. (2018) studied the financial position of English voluntary organisations and explored the relationship between the subjective perception of the organisation’s financial position and the financial ‘reality’. This suggests that there is a ‘financial reality’ which is available. It is argued here that quantitative analysis can provide a different or additional view but one which is inevitably still partial and mediated.

Extensive quantitative research by Clifford (2017) highlighted the value of a longitudinal perspective to be able to view shifts and patterns over time. Furthermore, Clifford’s research identified that in addition to mid-sized charities and those in less affluent local areas experiencing real income decline there has also been:

“Considerable variation in the fortunes of charities working in different fields of activity” (Clifford 2017, p1).

Using the International Classification of Non profit Organizations (ICNPO) as a basis for categorisation, the results highlighted particular sub-types of organisations that were more affected including social service and health

charities where we may reasonably expect some WGOs to be located. Due to the use of the ICNPO categories there is no data available for WGOs specifically.

There is a body of research that has specifically looked at the impact of austerity on organisations for Black and minoritised communities including Ware (2013) and Tilki et al. (2015). Ware's research identified that Black and minoritised communities have been particularly affected and that this is notable in areas such as funding for strategic 'voice', pressures of increased demand and the localism agenda that is not suited to a more dispersed community (Ware 2013).

Extant research on the impact of austerity on VCS organisations has drawn attention to a number of dimensions, in which the likelihood of being particularly adversely affected is increased. These include being:

- a VCS organisation that is in receipt of local authority funding.
- in a disadvantaged geographical location.
- a small to medium income size organisation.
- an organisation working in specific areas of activity such as social services and health.
- an organisation supporting Black and minoritised communities.

It is important to note that many WGOs may be at the intersection of a number of these dimensions and there is a significant potential for particularly adverse effects for them as a result.

As shown above there are both quantitative and qualitative studies researching the impact of austerity on VCS organisations, with some limited examples of quantitative analysis by sub-sector such as the notable exception of work by Clifford (2013, 2017). There is an absence of quantitative research in relation to WGOs as a sub-sector within wider VCS research at least in part because of the lack of identifiers for WGOs within the main datasets that are used. This is discussed in further detail in the methodology in chapter five. Indeed, there have been calls for improved data collection in a range of areas and intersectional analysis from a variety of sources including WGOs (Women's Budget Group 2019) and researchers (Towers and Walby 2012; Sandhu and Stephenson 2015, Adisa et al.2020).

### **3.4.2 WGOs and austerity**

The effect of austerity on WGOs themselves has also been subject to research. This research has highlighted that the impact on WGOs is nuanced from that of the wider VCS and this impact can be summarised in five key ways. First, i) an increased demand for WGO services (Hirst and Rinne 2012). Second, ii) key types of WGO rely heavily on public funding (Vacchelli and Kathrecha 2013). Third, iii) the ability to campaign and carry out strategic planning is compromised (Ishkanian 2014). Fourth, iv) specialist women's organisations working with women and girls facing additional disadvantages have been particularly affected (Imkaan 2008, 2016). Fifth, v) the workforce and volunteers within VCS organisations are also predominantly women (NCVO 2019), even more so within women's organisations. Each of these are discussed further in this section.

#### **i) An increased demand for WGO services**

WGOs working with women facing some of the most severe disadvantages have been the subject of existing research in this area. As discussed above research has indicated that for lone parents, women with disabilities, women affected by gender-based violence, women with low incomes and women from Black and minoritised backgrounds the impact of austerity has been particularly significant and damaging. This has translated in many cases to increased demand on services and compounded needs from the women seeking support as multiple issues coalesce into more complex problems:

“Most providers reported that the cuts were having a real effect on service provision, with fewer staff and longer waiting lists, combined with an increase in referrals from other service areas.” (Hirst and Rinne 2012, pvi).

#### **ii) Funding for WGOs**

The broader funding issues for VCS organisations outlined above, specifically those by Clifford (2013 and 2017) and Jones (2016) are particularly pertinent for WGOs. Key types of WGO rely heavily on public funding, are therefore more financially vulnerable and are not always able to compete in commissioning frameworks (Clifford et al. 2010, Women's Resource Centre 2013, Ishkanian 2014, Adisa et al. 2020). In terms of location, Towers and Walby (2012) in examining WGOs also identified uneven public funding cuts across localities.

Women's organisations have also been noted to be small and local in nature which makes them more vulnerable to changes in commissioning and increased competition (Towers and Walby 201; Vacchelli and Kathrecha 2013). Furthermore, some women's services such as refuges may be less able to raise funds to supplement income through charitable donations (an example referred to by Salamon as 'philanthropic insufficiency' (Salamon 1987)). Statutory funding therefore is an important source of income:

"There's also another reality for charities; people tend not to give to causes that are paid for by statutory bodies, such as women's refuges or advice services. It will be a long, and possibly futile, exercise for these vital organisations to substitute state funding with donations." (Kane and Allen 2011).

As noted above organisations who are more reliant on public sector funding are also more likely to be affected by austerity. This potentially adds an additional layer of difficulty for key women's services such as domestic abuse support, women's centres or health projects with continued reliance on local authority funding, at a time when funding is increasingly scarce. Bassel and Emejulu (2014) also point to greater competition for this funding which is causing disadvantage to organisations who work across a range of axes. This is said to occur because, in times of shrinking budgets, local authorities will look to support activities that fall within narrow and specific actions and support activities which focus on service delivery (rather than advocacy).

"In the current crisis, resource scarcity shrinks the available range of frames of contestation. It is difficult for these organizations to inflect agendas with multiple-axis (race, class, legal status, and gender) concerns because these may well delegitimize their efforts and weaken their competitive advantage vis-a-vis other organizations vying for the same funding." (Bassel and Emejulu 2014, p134).

Findings from extant research have also identified a disadvantageous effect of funding changes and cuts on the provision of women only services (Hirst and Rinne 2012; Towers and Walby 2012). For example:

"In 2011, the False Economy website sent Freedom of Information requests to 353 local authorities asking about cuts to charities that were greater than

five per cent. Two hundred and sixty four local authorities responded. It found that the total amount of funding lost to the domestic violence and sexual abuse sector in England was just under £2.5 million. This amounted to a 31 per cent cut in funding to the sector between 2010–11 and 2011–12.” (The TUC 2015, p23).

Heady et al. (2011) investigated whether there was a problem with the stability and sustainability of Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) organisations and if so, the nature of the problem. They identified that there was a perception that the sexual violence sub-sector has seen significant closure of services. They noted considerable change in the EVAWG sector with:

“Both service development and closure, and the emergence of potential mergers partly in response to the changing commissioning environment. This was supported by all sources of evidence.” (Heady et al. 2011, p5)

They also identified that for Rape Crisis centres most received funding from central government which “had saved them from closure”. (Heady et al. 2011, p5). The study is situated early within the period and as such does not show the extent of impact of austerity. It does however highlight the reliance on statutory funding and in particular the change to commissioning and funding arrangements negatively affecting Ending violence against women and girls organisations for Black and minoritised women and girls due to their small size.

### **iii) Compromised ability to campaign and take radical action**

There are several issues affecting the ability for WGOs to carry out effective campaigning. Alongside, the increased workload demands from more women needing support and support with more complex issues, Ishkanian (2014) points to the increased focus on cost-saving as impacting negatively on the ability for WGOs to campaign effectively.

“In the current policy context which prioritises cost savings, women’s organisations are shifting their campaigning focus around domestic violence away from human rights and gender equality towards highlighting how their work provides good value for money and cost savings.” (Ishkanian 2014, p347).

Hirst and Rinne also cite a lack of 'political clout' from the sector and concerns from a range of actors about the lack of a champion for WGOs, the need for recognition for WGOs and for:

"Central government to give clear messages about the need for and value of women's services." (2012, p77).

Emejulu and Bassel (2015) build on this theme identifying a lack of opportunities for radical action for minoritised women and girls. They note:

"a disconnect between minority women's experiences and analyses of their precarity, their desire to take radical action and the compliant and domesticating projects and programmes that are currently being offered by some of their third sector 'allies'." (Emejulu and Bassel 2015, p86).

#### **iv) Specialist WGOs**

Here the term specialist WGOs is used to denote those WGOs with a particular focus on supporting women facing specific additional disadvantages such as Organisations for Black and Minoritised Women and Girls (OBMWG), those for women with a disability, lone parents, those affected by gender-based violence. From the range of literature discussed above, it is reasonable to expect that specialist WGOs have been particularly affected by austerity policies.

Academic literature is not extensive in this area but there are a number of important exceptions.<sup>3</sup> Again, organisations have been affected by an increase in demand on services and for specialist organisations this may be particularly acute. Walby also highlights possible links between austerity and increased incidents of domestic violence which will inevitably lead to increased demand on services for women and girls and a reduction in the ability of women to exit abusive situations (Walby 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> Several key pieces of literature from WGOs on this topic have also been produced and are analysed as part of this study. As such, they are not considered in detail here and are explored in detail in chapter eight.

For organisations supporting disabled women affected by domestic violence, Ryan points to “a pandemic of domestic violence against disabled women” (Ryan 2019, p245). and a serious shortage of services to provide appropriate support for women with disabilities:

“In 2017, Women’s Aid said almost a fifth of specialist refuges have now closed since the coalition first gained power.” (Ryan 2019, p252).

Armstrong specifically highlights that:

“In 2016, 48 per cent of domestic violence services in England were running without any funding. In Sunderland, Cumbria and Devon there are no refuges left.” (Armstrong 2017, p324).

Further cuts in provision for EAWG sector organisations such as refuges have also been identified in less direct ways. The TUC point to the removal of the ringfence around the Supporting People fund which has been important for refuge provision that has also led to cuts in provision. They note that:

“Spending on this area is projected to have fallen by a median of 45.3 per cent, in the period from 2010 to 2015.” (TUC 2015, p22).

Specialist organisations are also reported to be losing out on contracts to non-specialist providers. Rape crisis services have benefitted from central government funding during this time; however, local commissioning has also impacted the services as contracts have been awarded to larger non-WGO providers (TUC 2015). The TUC also note that the impact of non-specialist service providers in competition with specialist Organisations for Black and Minoritised Women and Girls (OBMWG) affected by domestic violence is particularly notable:

“Between April and July 2014, 10 specialist domestic violence services across England lost funding for services they were providing. All but one of these 10 services lost their services to a non-specialist service provider. The loss of specialist services, particularly services for BME women, to larger, non-specialist service providers such as housing associations, has been a feature of the domestic violence and sexual abuse service landscape over recent years.” (TUC 2015, p23).



OBMWG are disproportionately affected through, a range of the changes to funding arrangements for voluntary sector organisations including cuts and preferences for larger organisations in Government commissioned contracts (Vacchelli and Kathrecha 2013, Tilki et al. 2015, Sandhu and Stephenson 2015, Chapman 2017). Vacchelli et al. (2015) identified a disproportionate risk for OBMWGs:

“Working across two or more aspects of inequality, such as gender, race, social class and migration status, can make organisations more vulnerable when cuts are being implemented in both areas.” (Vacchelli et al. 2015, p184).

By focusing on and conducting research with OBMWG, Vacchelli et al. (2013) can explore the impact of policy at the individual organisation level to highlight the complexities and layered effects of disadvantage that result. Without paying sufficient attention to the case of WGOs for Black and minoritised women and girls and considering instead the women’s sector as a homogenous group, such disadvantage would not otherwise be visible. In conclusion the authors identify ‘ideologically driven reforms’ as responsible for:

“Decimating women’s organisations ability to provide fundamental services to women in vulnerable situations.” (Vacchelli et al. 2013, p187).

Based on research in Coventry, Sandhu and Stephenson (2015) also conclude that spending cuts are already affecting and will continue to affect Black and minoritised women disproportionately and that this will exacerbate patterns of discrimination and disadvantage. Emejulu and Bassel (2015) conducted a study of minority women’s activism in Scotland, England and France in response to austerity, to consider how third sector organisations, policymakers and social movements have responded to the perspectives of minority women. They incorporate structural analyses as well as intersectionality debates to raise issues about the precarity of minority groups. They also highlight that within the category of women, Black and minoritised women are more likely to be linked to the state through direct and sub-contracted employment as well as the use of state services through gendered caring roles. In facing issues resulting from austerity, they identify both ‘material’ and ‘discursive’ barriers as minoritised women are

discursively constructed as 'victims'. Importantly, they highlight that while some make a choice to focus on family survival others:

“Seek to subvert their precarity through mobilising in communities”.  
(Emejulu and Bassel 2015, p87).

This is significant because it recognises the ways in which women are also able to mobilise their own sources of power to counter austerity, rather than just remain constructed as passive recipients.

The authors use an 'intersectional' lens through which to explore difficulties faced by minority women and offer an implicitly more radical approach than the other studies, suggesting space for minority women to challenge dominant representations of crisis and austerity and to offer “new political imaginations and solidarities for social justice” (Emejulu and Bassel 2015, p95).

#### **v) Women as employees and volunteers within WGOs**

Women make up a majority of the VCS workforce at 67 per cent (NCVO 2021c). Employees and volunteers may be directly affected as individuals but are also then affected at a further level as an employee or volunteer by the impact on their organisation, a dynamic which is frequently overlooked. Bassel and Emejulu (2014) identify at a personal level, the difficulties for activists or potential activists to campaign due to the effects of austerity depleting personal resources such as time and energy although for others the stakes are so high that they have been mobilised to campaign. For workers within WGOs, who are predominantly women and who are in relatively low paid and insecure jobs in the sector (Adams et al. 2022) or for volunteers (who are not paid at all), the effects of austerity may well be felt strongly. In addition, there is a further stress of increased workloads and the emotional labour of supporting others, particularly as the needs of women become more complex and more severe.

#### **3.4.3 Section summary**

Extant research highlights the difficulties faced by WGOs due to increased demands on services as more women are in need and other service providers are depleted, the impact of funding cuts (directly to VCS organisations and indirectly through shifts to other service providers and the removal of ringfenced

funding), the shift from grants to contracts and the reduced capacity for campaigning and wider gender equality work.

There is also a particularly large impact on specialist organisations supporting women facing additional and intersecting disadvantages which is exacerbating existing inequalities. While women facing additional disadvantages have often been constructed as 'victims' Bassel and Emejulu also remind us of the agency of women to resist and challenge.

Academic WGO research has mainly been qualitative with notable exceptions such as Towers and Walby (2012) and Adisa et al. (2020). It has been demonstrated that there is a lack of quantitative data, particularly disaggregated data, and the absence of a whole sub-sector view of WGOs. WGO research has also generally not utilised a longitudinal approach and while Emejulu and Bassel have highlighted the impact of discursive barriers for minoritised women (Emejulu and Bassel 2015), studies have not focused on examining shifting discourses and representations of WGOs and their work.

A number of the studies identify structural issues of gender inequality as a cause of the gendered impact of austerity but many of the suggestions for change are focused on liberal feminist-based adaptations to the existing system.

### **3.5 Social changes and climate crisis**

Several issues were discussed above relating to the continued ability for VCS and WGO organisations to campaign through a lack of independence from the state and a lack of resources to do so. This issue becomes increasingly pertinent as major campaigns and protests come to characterise the latter half of the period including #metoo, Black Lives Matter, climate protests and what has been termed the 'culture wars'. While separate issues, they all have consequences for WGOs and are underpinned by recurrent themes of inequality. Literature is emerging to consider the implications for the VCS in a number of these areas.

The #metoo movement originated by Tarana Burke in 2006 became widely popularised from 2017 onwards following high profile incidents of harassment and abuse. Intense debates between gender critical feminism which is critical of

gender identity and committed to the centrality of biological sex, and other tenets of feminism advocating for the rights of trans people, has also been evident across this time. The UK government consultation on the Gender recognition act in 2018 was a particular site of conflict during this period. Many prominent organisations have stated their support for transwomen within their services for example Women's Aid.

#charitysnowwhite sought to bring to light the racism within the charitable sector in the UK. The hashtag became prominent in 2019 following the discovery of training materials by Citizens Advice which contained racist stereotypes about people from Black and minoritised backgrounds (Mohdin 2019). #charitysnowwhite led to significant levels of recognition of issues of racism within the sector. The killing of George Floyd in 2020 led to a series of global protests against police brutality and racism and a sharp rise in support for the Black Lives Matter movement, which was originally founded in 2013. This issue of racism within the sector has continued to receive much needed attention. Gaby's study (2020) examined the influence of Black Lives Matter (BLM) on two social movement organisations. She noted the importance of external forces on VCS organisations.

“Exogenous processes can stimulate organizational transformation, impacting the mission, community position, and longevity of organizations.”  
(Gaby 2020, p1132).

In the UK, ACEVO and voice4change produced a report in 2020 entitled Home Truths. The report details how the charity sector has a problem with racial and ethnic diversity with the issues of under-representation of Black and minoritised people. The Booska paper by Ubele Initiative (2021) reviewed ways in which infrastructure organisations and funders have responded to racism since BLM and suggested key areas for long term change. At the time of this review, no academic literature could be identified that specifically examined these issues in relation to WGOs. This study includes consideration of specialist OBMWG within the representations of WGOs and their work, through an intersectional analysis of quantitative data and within the documentary analysis.

The school climate strikes in 2018 started by Greta Thunberg inspired protests around the world about the inaction on the climate crisis. The climate crisis is an issue which disproportionately affects women as it amplifies existing inequalities of gender and location (UN women 2023). These issues are particularly acute for women and girls living in areas of conflict, geographical areas where climate crisis is felt more strongly and women facing additional disadvantages.

Feminism and particularly ecofeminism has a longstanding relationship with promoting care for the natural environment and challenging economic rationales for its degradation. It is unclear the extent to which UK WGOs are engaging with the issue of the climate crisis. As at, January 2023 only two women's groups were members of the 140 membership climate coalition in the UK (Climate coalition 2023). Notably one of these two is the National Federation of Women's Institutes with a large membership base. There is a paucity of academic research in relation to the climate crisis and either the VCS or WGOs in the UK. Kagan and Dodge conducted a literature review on VCS organisations and the climate crisis in 2022 and concluded that there is urgent need for knowledge in this area (Kagan and Dodge 2022). It is particularly notable that there were no examples of WGOs and the climate crisis identified in Kagan and Dodge's literature review despite the known gendered impact of climate change and its importance within the feminism movement. This study includes reflection on the extent to which issues of climate change and gender are represented in WGOs and their work.

This period has also been characterised by increased challenges to a campaigning role for VCS organisations. This has included the introduction of the Lobbying Act, the development of the 'culture wars' with high profile challenges to charities such as Barnados, National Trust and the Runnymede Trust, alongside curbs on protesting and the controversial policing of the vigil for Sarah Everard<sup>4</sup>. Ivanovska Hadjievska researched discourse and narratives around #Charitysofwhite and the Common sense group, warning that if civil society:

"Is turned into yet another site of the so-called 'culture wars', exacerbating instead of preventing the solidification of polarised political identities, this might erode trust in CSOs and create chilling effects on CSOs' voices,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56394344>

negatively affecting the quality of democracy.” (Ivanovska Hadjievska 2022, p3).

This is concerning for the ability to raise issues of structural gender inequality particularly in light of increased pressures on WGOs from austerity affecting their ability to campaign.

Gaps have been identified in current research about all these live issues. This may in part be due to their location at end of this period, but it also signifies an urgency for academic research in these areas. While the focus of this research is not on any one of these single topics, the influence and impact of this context on the shape and shaping of WGOs and the discourses about them and their work across the period will be explored.

### **3.6 The COVID-19 crisis**

There is a burgeoning body of work examining the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on communities. The role of the VCS within the pandemic in mobilising to support local communities and the vaccination programme has brought renewed interest in the VCS by the state and local government. While it is not possible to do justice to cover widely the literature in this area, there are several issues which it is particularly important to note.

On the topic of the wider VCS, research has highlighted the importance of existing community infrastructure and services in being able to respond to emergency situations such as the pandemic (McCabe et al 2020). It has also drawn attention to the ways in which the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities (McCabe et al. 2020), how VCS organisations have been able to adjust and innovate to the change (Dayson et al. 2021a, Scott et al. 2022) and how particularly smaller charities, have been able to support some of the most disadvantaged (Dayson et al. 2021b). This has also led to calls for VCS organisations to be integrally involved (Scott et al. 2022, Magill 2022) and adequately resourced (Scott et al. 2022) to play a key role in ‘building back better’ in the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted a number of areas of concern which are of particular relevance to WGO organisations, and these have been raised in documents and campaigning work by a number of WGOs such as Women's Aid (Davidge 2020), Sisters of Frida (Jacobs et al. 2020), Women's Resource Centre (2020) including a joint call for action signed by over 60 Women and equality organisations (Women's Budget Group 2020a). As above, as a number of these documents are analysed as part of the research, they are not discussed in detail in this chapter. However, it is important to note here that again women have been affected in different ways to men particularly because of their gendered caring roles and their concentration in less secure and part-time employment so that school closures, furlough schemes and increased community care needs all significantly affected women. The pandemic also had particularly adverse implications for women from Black and minoritised backgrounds (Women's Budget Group 2020b).

The lockdown policies to minimise the spread of COVID-19 had adverse implications for those seeking to exit abusive domestic situations which was highlighted through campaign work by WGOs (Davidge 2020, Banga and Roy 2020). This situation was exacerbated for disabled women and girls who were affected by violence in their homes. The COVID-19 pandemic has therefore again demonstrated the pervasiveness of gender inequality, its intersection with other inequalities and the importance of a voice for raising issues of gender inequality.

The pandemic has also renewed interest in the transformative potential of the VCS as a site of action, campaigning, and specialist support. It has also demonstrated that while achievements have been made by VCS organisations during the pandemic, this relies on long term investment to be sustained in meaningful ways.

### **3.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter discussed several key issues and developments that have characterised the 2008 to 2020 period and existing research on WGOs in these areas. It introduced the development of the Big Society agenda, austerity policies, global campaigns and movements and social and climate change such as #metoo, Black Lives Matter and the climate crisis, followed by the public health

crisis of COVID-19. It has been a period of intense change and difficulty. Research has brought to light the difficulties faced by WGOs due to increased demands on services as more women are in need and other service providers are depleted, the impact of funding cuts (directly to VCS organisations and indirectly through shifts to other service providers), the shift from grants to contracts, and the reduced capacity for campaigning and wider gender equality work. It has also shown that WGOs (and the wider VCS) have been essential to providing services during these periods of intense difficulty and during the COVID-19 public health crisis were able to respond rapidly to changing need.

Second, it has drawn attention to the effect on specialist organisations supporting women facing additional and intersecting disadvantages which is exacerbating existing inequalities, as well as the need to acknowledge the agency of women to resist and challenge.

Third, this chapter has highlighted areas that have not received sufficient scholarly attention. Except for a number of studies exploring VAW organisations, the extent to which the effects on the women's voluntary sector more broadly, have impacted on equality issues has not been adequately explored. As Vacchelli and Kathrecha note:

“Academic work has rarely been focused on women's organisations and their specific role in making women's voices heard and in providing services for vulnerable women.” (Vacchelli and Kathrecha 2013, p8).

This includes the absence of a view of WGOs as a whole sector and gaps in our understanding about the impact of these challenges on WGOs. There is a particular paucity of research in relation to how broader social change and the climate crisis are impacting on and being addressed by WGOs.

Fourth, this chapter has drawn attention to methodological gaps, while there has been limited qualitative research with WGOs, it has been demonstrated that there is a lack of quantitative data, particularly disaggregated data about different types of WGO, and the absence of a whole sub-sector view of WGOs. WGO research has also generally not utilised a longitudinal approach and while Emejulu and Bassel have highlighted the impact of discursive barriers for Black and



minoritised women (Emejulu and Bassel 2015), studies have not focused on examining shifting discourses and representations of WGOs and their work.

Fifth, a number of the studies identify structural issues of gender inequality as a cause of the gendered impact of austerity but many of the suggestions for change are focused on liberal feminist-based adaptations to the existing system. Chapter four that follows, outlines how this study will seek to contribute to this environment.

## **Chapter four: a feminist post-structural approach**

Feminism and post-structuralism provide the basis for the theoretical approach to this study. To present and discuss this approach, this chapter comprises two sections. The first outlines how a feminist post-structural approach differs from other approaches and why it has been selected for this study. The second details the specific approach taken. It introduces the core feminist and post-structural themes of this research - power, visibility, difference and intersectionality, and gender equality - and how these will inform both the methodology and the analysis of the research. The chapter concludes with reflections on the role of 'transformative action' and a reflexive approach within this feminist research.

### **4.1 Why a feminist approach?**

This study is rooted in an ontology of social constructionism which argues that reality is constructed:

“Reality (is) shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallized over time.” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p109).

A feminist approach is pursued where gender equality goals are central, and gender in particular is proposed as a key social construct. As Stark notes, viewing gender as a social construct allows us to consider how it may be constructed in alternate and more equitable ways:

“Gender rather than sex has often been a focal point for feminists. This may be because gender is believed to be mutable rather than fixed. If gender is culturally constructed, then it has the capacity to be constructed differently and therefore could enable us to find new and more egalitarian ways for gender to function in society.” (Stark 2016, p63).

Feminists challenge the liberal assumption of gender neutrality and the notion of a universal subject. It is argued by feminists that this perceived gender neutrality has instead been based on an assumed male perspective. Feminist approaches highlight this gender bias to illuminate the ways in which this perceived neutrality has led to and compounded inequality for those with a marginalised gender or gender-identity.

Within voluntary sector studies, research topics are frequently explored in gender neutral ways. Few studies recognise and account for gender difference. This in turn means that research in the field fails to sufficiently account for gender inequality. Christiansen-Ruffman's review of literature published in the *Journal of Voluntary Action Research* identified that:

"Women have been largely invisible, both as researchers and as subjects of research." (Christiansen-Ruffman 1985, p 94).

This remains an issue with the uptake of feminist and critical research within the field today. Coule et al., noted in their literature review of work published in a selection of voluntary sector focused journals between 1970 and 2009 that only 4 per cent of all articles were classified as from a critical approach and the methodologies that were utilised became more 'mainstream' over time (Coule et al. 2022).

This issue is also demonstrated in the review of existing literature in the preceding chapters, where women's organisations are rarely included in general voluntary sector organisation research, or analysis of types of voluntary sector organisation and there are low numbers of feminist studies. Where research has been undertaken in the field from a feminist approach, it has enabled studies to illuminate important issues of interest within the sector.

There are examples of studies from within VCS research which look at the gendered nature of volunteering (Christiansen-Ruffman 1985), women's philanthropy (Dale et al. 2018), studies which investigate women's activism (Craddock 2017), studies focused on how gender stereotypes impact on women fundraisers' careers (Dale and Breeze, 2021) and the role of school-based volunteering in reproducing societies' classed and gendered inequalities (Lau 2022). These issues would have been rendered invisible without an approach that centralises gender as a fundamental concept. Dodge et al. (2022) investigated gender specific critical studies in VCS research focusing on three examples to illustrate that this type of research:

"Uncover(s) hidden assumptions and/or uncomfortable erasures that mask gender-based inequities and injustices; resist hegemonic scientific norms in doing and writing research; and reject 'woman' as a uniform object of theorizing." (Dodge et al. 2022, p3).

There has been a paucity of feminist approaches to VCS research and yet from the discussion and examples above, it is clear that they have much to offer. A study focused on women's organisations requires a theoretical framework that can pay sufficient critical attention to gender and power relations. A framework that can provide new ways to explore more attentively the impact of key events on the landscape of women's organisations, the interaction with gender and the implications for equality goals, while acknowledging difference, not just between women and men but within the category of 'woman' and those with a marginalised gender-identity. A framework that can pay attention to the need to 'amplify the voices' of those who have not previously been equitably included.

#### **4.2 Defining the feminist approach**

There is not one feminism but a range comprising a broad spectrum of thought, approaches and movements of feminism (Humm 1992). Flax offers one definition unifying feminist theory:

“A fundamental goal of feminist theory is (and ought to be) to analyze gender relations: how gender relations are constituted and experienced and how we think, or equally important do not think about them”. (Flax 1987, p622).

As Kemp and Squires note, an essential element to add to this definition, is the need to include a critical and transformational element (Kemp and Squires 1997). Feminism is not just about examining gender relations but is also fundamentally about creating change to address inequality.

A range of broad categories has been used to consider different approaches of feminist theory emphasising different histories of thought and epistemological approaches. There is insufficient space to cover everything here, and as such an overview of some of the main lines of feminist thought is provided - liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, critical feminism and post-structural feminism - followed by an explanation of the post-structural feminist approach pursued in this study.

Liberal feminism focuses on changes particularly within education and employment to balance gender within existing society and its institutions (Walby 1990, Humm 1992). It offers limited ways to critically assess the structures within

society and culture's impact on gender equality and does not seek to consider radical possibilities for wider change and social justice. Challenges of ethnocentrism and individualism have been levelled by critics such as Alison Jagger (Humm 1992 p181). While Frazer states that:

“Changes within the conventional political realm and measures taken within political institutions – legislation and governmental administration – will not bring about the kind of social change that really makes a difference to people's lives.” (Frazer 1998, p53).

Conversely, Marxist feminism builds on the work of Marx and Engels to explore the ways in which gender inequality is a product of capitalism. It offers ways to explore women's roles in capitalist society, the role of unpaid labour in the home and gendered employment as part of a broader capitalist system. Marxist feminist theory creates a space to consider the way in which capitalism seeks to maximise profit through neo-liberal policies which prioritise reductions in state spending and emphasise individual responsibility. However, capitalism doesn't sufficiently account for all women's experiences of male domination.

Conversely, radical feminism has at its roots the examination of gender inequality whereby men as a group dominate women in a system of patriarchy. Criticised for failing to sufficiently account for difference between women based on class, ethnicity and disability, it nonetheless offers a strong basis for the development of examining gender relations in new ways, asking new feminist questions and challenging existing norms and practices. The slogan 'the personal is political' is fundamental to understanding and highlighting the ways in which patriarchy is pervasive and enters all aspects of life. Key radical feminists raised the role of sexual relations as political which led to significant advances in tackling issues such as gender-based violence.

Critical feminism also described as neo-Marxist (Gannon and Davies 2012) builds on Marxist feminism. Critical theory emerged in the 1920s and 1930s in Germany within the Frankfurt School of social research who:

“Developed a reflexive and critical social inquiry that saw social scientific knowledge itself as implicated in complex modes of production and regimes of truth.” (Gannon and Davies 2012, p68).

While maintaining a focus on capitalism, critical epistemology is “transactional, subjectivist” and has “value-mediated findings” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p109). The values of researcher and research participants are recognised as influencing the research as it seeks to generate greater understanding offering both a more transformative and participative approach (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p109). The need to include a critical, emancipatory, and transformational element is emphasised (Kemp and Squires 1997, Gannon and Davies 2012) and has been incorporated into many feminist approaches to research.

Post-structuralism is a broad and contested grouping. It can be seen as distinct from post-modernism, although the two terms are often conflated in descriptions of the approach. Hesse-Biber uses the term postmodernism but the description applies to post-structuralism:

“Postmodernism challenges positivism’s emphasis on objective truth and instead posits how dominant discourse/language serves to oppress and maintain existing power relations within a society. Postmodernism focuses on deconstructing dominant images, symbols, and texts in order to disrupt their meanings and question their veracity, often by pointing out their class, race, and gender biases.” (Hesse-Biber 2010, p19).

Within post-structural feminism there is a focus on the importance of discourse in shaping gender relations and the need to avoid essentialism through the examination of difference. Post-structural feminist approaches consider the ways in which power is dispersed and where it may be concentrated. They also provide a framework to examine narratives and counter-narratives and how these are subject to change. A post-structural feminist approach focuses on where there are sources of power that can be used for positive change for increased equality and can also therefore accommodate the critical feminist demand for transformative potential.

As identified in the literature review the use of post-structural approaches in VCS research is limited, but Foucault’s thought has been particularly influential (Millbourne and Cushman 2015, Nickel and Eikenberry 2016). Bourdieu, who is considered by some to be a post-structural theorist (Calhoun 2002) has also been significant (Taylor 2004, Macmillan 2013, Dean 2016, Lau 2022). There are

studies that focus on discourse in voluntary sector studies. Bennett (2015) for example, explored the change in discourse of Government policy documents toward the VCS alongside an investigation of how actors within the VCS responded and utilised 'identity cues' contained within these. Eikenberry (2019) examined shifts in the discourses of volunteering and civic action to reveal the possibility of a new era of increasingly politicised volunteering and civic action and Brewis et al. (2021) examined debates around voluntary action comparing different historical moments of economic and social transformation.

### **4.3 Section summary**

Post-structuralism and feminism can be brought together to examine and deconstruct meaning, to centre gender, highlight biases, power differentials and issues of inequality. They also emphasise the fluid nature of the process of domination and representation. Section two below argues that a post-structuralist feminist approach provides significant benefits for this study.

### **4.4 Section two: the post-structural feminist approach in this study**

Taking forward the post-structuralist feminist approach, this research conceptualises and explores three different representations of WGOs. The first, a quantitative representation, the second a representation based on government policy and third a representation based on WGO documents. For clarification, this is not to say that there is unity within each representation, but the grouping allows an examination of what within these spaces may be the dominant *representations* that are made through the data and the text and reflect on the differences between them. These representations are outlined in further detail in the methodology in chapter five.

An analysis of 'representations' has been selected as this can be an effective way of revealing 'competing discourses':

"Once language is understood in terms of competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world, which imply differences in the organization of social power, then language becomes an important site of political struggle." (Weedon 1997, p23)

Due to the breadth of post-structural feminism, this study has a specific focus on four central theoretical concepts: **power**, **visibility**, **difference** and **intersectionality**, and **gender equality**. These are outlined in turn below, with their specific relevance to this study.

#### 4.4.1 Power

This study focuses on three main aspects of power, drawing particularly from Foucault. The first is the *discursive* nature of power with a focus on language. The 'active' nature of language in shaping the world is acknowledged so that:

“Language is theorized as constitutive rather than representational, a matrix of enabling and constraining boundaries rather than a mirror (Rorty, 1979; Tyler, 1987).” (Lather 1991, p105).

The language used by and about WGOs, as well as the way in which they are categorised and labelled within a quantitative representation, enables, and constrains the boundaries of a WGO sector and those within it. There are narratives and counter-narratives of WGOs and of government which are explored through the analysis of documents produced by each. A focus on the construction and analysis of the quantitative dataset as well as the language used by WGOs and government in the documents they produced during this period enables an examination of how the 'landscape of WGOs' is represented and viewed by different actors, and how these change over time. In this way both the quantitative and qualitative elements are seen as constitutive.

The second use is the *dispersed* nature of power. Power for Foucault is:

“Exercised in myriad practices and loci of power legitimated within localised disciplinary mechanisms of surveillance, regulation and classification.”  
(Code 2000, p399).

In this way, policies, data, images and more can be conceived as mechanisms of power. This broadens our focus away from just laws and policies to reflect on how an array of sources contribute to regulation and classification and self-regulation. Power is also dispersed and located in a variety of agents. Rather than a binary zero-sum notion of power that some actors have, and others do not, power is dispersed, and different actors will hold different levels of power, in



different situations and at different points in time. Power may therefore be concentrated in specific places, even if it is dispersed. This also helps focus on ways in which power can be mobilised from unexpected sources.

The third use of power is power as both a *positive and negative* force. For Foucault power is not:

“...merely negative, repressive... it is productive of discourse, pleasure, meaning, subversive resistance.” (Code 2000, p399).

Attention will be given to identify how power is used and areas where there may be ‘dominating effects’ (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016) and asymmetrical power relationships. As above, power can also take the form of resistance. This study reviews where power can be identified and its particular purpose in a myriad of locations and circumstances.

#### **4.4.2 Visibility**

The organisations included in this research, already have a degree of visibility with the state, as they are registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales. However, they are also organisations who as a group are dispersed within other categories used in the administrative dataset, in this way they are also less visible than other charities. Visibility is:

“Less a matter of becoming physically visible than a matter of attaining discursive attention and recognition, of which being visible simply serves as a metaphor. The underlying assumption is that visibility is a stand-in for something other than itself, namely, attention and recognition, which everyone wants but few people get. Therefore, it follows, it would be necessary to challenge those who have acquired more ‘visibility’ than others *and* those who seem to bestow ‘visibility’ on select parts of the world at the expense of others.” (Chow 2010, p64).

Identification brings the possibility of recognition, where women’s charitable organisations can be more visible, better understood and acknowledged for the breadth of work that they do. This acknowledgement could be from wider society, new allies, funders, media, and Government. Importantly, it also brings the possibility of increased support and resourcing as the issues that they face as

organisations and raise for the women they support become potentially better understood. The terms possibly and potentially are used because they are certainly not guaranteed.

Visibility as Foucault suggests (Foucault 2020) and as was introduced earlier in chapter two, can also bring unwelcome impacts such as increased scrutiny and control and misrepresentation. In quantifying and categorising organisations in new ways, an understanding is needed of balancing the potential benefits for organisations of becoming visible against these potential consequences. These issues are discussed further in chapter nine. As Lather notes, the importance of reflexivity and examination of the processes taken and the implications of these is essential:

“To make something available for discussion is to make of it an object (Haug, 1987). This suspicion of the intellectual who both objectifies and speaks for others inveighs us to develop a kind of self-reflexivity that will enable us to look closely at our own practice in terms of how we contribute to dominance in spite of our liberatory intentions. Within this self-reflexive context, the central question becomes: What would a sociological project look like that was not a technology of regulation and surveillance?” (Lather 1991, p15).

#### **4.4.3 Difference and intersectionality**

Post-structuralism takes its starting point as the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, where a sign comprises a ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’. The signifier is any material thing that signifies and the signifier the concept that the signifier relates to. Post- structuralism moves beyond these fixed signs and signifiers to highlight that:

“The meaning of a particular signifier is not fixed in the sign but is plural and changing, governed by the Derridean concept of *différance*. *Différance* implies that meaning is the effect of a temporary fixing of signifiers within a system of differences, in which meaning is always subject to challenge and fixity constantly deferred.” (Code 2000, p398).

A post-structural approach is one focused on interrogation or deconstruction to identify meaning and to consider the way in which meaning is subject to

multiplicity whether over time, or in different contexts. Difference is central to a post-structural understanding. In this study difference will resonate throughout via the exploration of defining and categorising WGOs within organisations, between organisations and across time and place. Difference should not however be seen as difference *from* a norm. Difference *from* suggests that difference does not exist in its own right, but only in relation to something else, a 'norm' from which difference is judged. Judging difference on this basis perpetuates a process of 'othering' (Griffiths 1995).

The use of the term 'woman' should also be acknowledged as contested. Yet there is a need to find a workable way forward to define WGOs so that a representation of a landscape of WGOs can be constructed, but which also allows for fluidity, incoherence and challenge. Gayatri Spivak has argued that feminists need to rely on 'strategic essentialism' where the term 'women' is used to bring unity around a common goal while acknowledging the temporary and contingent nature of the term (Spivak 1988). The terms woman and women are therefore used in this study to denote a category, but it is also acknowledged that this can encompass a variety of positions. In this study WGOs includes organisations that support people with questions of gender.

A post-structural approach also considers how terms are *not* used or how they *could be* used:

"To deconstruct is not to negate or dismiss, but to call into question and perhaps, most importantly to open up a term, like the subject to a reusage or redeployment that previously has not been authorized." (Butler 1992, p15).

Everything therefore has the potential to be different and there is always a degree of possibility for change. Seeking and acknowledging multiplicity, difference and the ways in which assumed terms could be different or transformed will provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding and encourage reflection on how things can be 'otherwise' for positive change.

Angela Davis brought together Marxist feminism with consideration of 'Women, Race and Class' (1982) and the relationships between them. Crenshaw (1989)

developed the notion of intersectionality in examining the overlapping of multiple disadvantages, which has also been developed by Hill Collins (1998, 2000, 2002) and other prominent Black feminist scholars.

Initially developed from Black feminist thought exploring the complexity of layers of oppression faced by women from Black and minoritised backgrounds, intersectionality has since been applied to consider a wider analysis encompassing for example class, sexuality, disability and other inequalities. In recognising that there is no one unified representation of man or woman, hooks asks:

“Since men are not equals in white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure which men do women want to be equal to? Do women share a common vision of what equality means?” (hooks 1984, p18).

Intersectionality encourages reflection on the inequalities that exist between women as well as between men and women. In reviewing the various iterations in which intersectional analysis has been used Cho et al. state that:

“What makes an analysis intersectional...is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power.” (Cho et al. 2013, p795).

Intersectionality has taken numerous forms and is subject to debate about how to operationalise the concept to the greatest effect. Dhamoon (2011) adopts a Foucauldian approach to intersectionality as a ‘matrix of meaning-making’ which:

“Aims to foreground an expanded Foucauldian understanding of power so as to capture the ways in which processes of differentiation and systems of domination interrelate. The focus of analysis is thus not “just” domination but the very interactive processes and structures in which meanings of privilege and penalty are produced, reproduced, and resisted in contingent and relational ways.” (Dhamoon 2011, p238).

Importantly, Dhamoon’s notion of intersectionality emphasises the ways in which power is diffused and that:

“Because we all occupy *differing* degrees and forms of privilege and penalty we are always and already implicated in the *conditions* that structure a matrix.” (Dhamoon 2011, p239)

This has implications for considering in what ways women and girls facing additional disadvantage may also have forms of both ‘privilege and penalty’ but also for the researcher in understanding the ways in which we contribute to these interactive processes and structures:

“This disruption entails a self-reflexive critique of the analyst and her or his own implication in the matrix of meaning-making, specifically her or his relationship to knowledge production and research subjects. This can make intersectional-type research challenging, for it demands a willingness to address sometimes uncomfortable relations of implication in the production and organization of unequal power relations.” (Dhamoon 2011, p240).

Feminist commitments to exploring gender coupled with intersectionality are central to an understanding of WGOs. An intersectional approach draws attention to the ways in which differing disadvantages intersect to complex effect and provides a framework for reflection on sources of privilege and penalty within the research and for the researcher. As Crenshaw states it is also important to note that:

“Intersectional erasures are not exclusive to Black women. People of color within LGBTQ movements; girls of color in the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline; women within immigration movements; trans women within feminist movements; and people with disabilities fighting police abuse — all face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, able-ism and more.” (Crenshaw 2015).

#### **4.4.4 Gender equality**

The term ‘gender equality’ is a contested one, open to “stretching, bending, shrinking, and fixing” (Lombardo et al. 2009). Fixing gender equality risks a focus on a specific set of goals that are said to represent gender equality, while stretching, bending and shrinking are strategies employed to use the term to meet a variety of political, theoretical or policy needs. Instead, what Lombardo et al., propose is that *their* understanding of gender equality (recognising that theirs is

also a definition from a particular position and is open to contestation) of gender equality takes into account:

“The pervasive character of gender inequality as something that is present in all domains of reality and that intersects with other complex inequalities, the existence of structural obstacles to gender equality, the need to transform power relations between women and men and the empowerment of women.” (Lombardo et al. 2012, p8).

The normative assumption in this study is also that gender equality is different from, but connected to and should be concerned with, a wider notion of equalities and that while a fixed goal for gender equality is difficult to discern, it is important to recognise that it entails transforming the relationship between gender and asymmetrical power relationships.

Feminist notions of gender equality also require the goal of action. Criticism has been levelled at post-structural approaches for a perceived lack of action to address gender inequality. Indeed, poststructuralism has been criticised for the potential for nihilism, through a questioning of everything and thus ‘leaving nothing’ from which a platform for change can be built. How then can a post-structural approach assist with a practical goal of gender equality? Lather argues that the focus should be on reflexivity to question where knowledge has come from and a focus on the action that is still required to address key issues of inequality (Lather 1991). Reflecting on the comments of Judith Butler, Tong outlines the way in which Butler sees action and theory as connected elements:

“[Something] besides theory must take place...We are all, in the very act of social transformation, lay philosophers, presupposing a vision of the world, of what is right, of what is just, of what is abhorrent, of what human action is and can be, of what constitutes the necessary and sufficient conditions of life.” (Butler 2004, p204-205).

In this way the feminist call for action is not lost and can be successfully incorporated into a post-structural approach and this study.

#### **4.5 Section Summary**

The section above has demonstrated the links between the theoretical concepts in this study, drawn from a feminist and post-structural position. It has outlined the specific ways in which these concepts are understood and will be operationalised in the study. Noting the importance of a reflexive approach that questions hidden assumptions and takes account of complexity but also an approach that identifies practical action that can be taken to progress equality.

#### **4.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter has introduced the feminist approach that was used and the tenets of post-structuralism that were of particular importance in this study. The discussion above has outlined the reasons for the suitability and key strengths of a feminist post-structural approach to exploring WGOs.

The chapter also specifically introduced the core themes of this research informed by the theoretical framework – power, visibility, difference and intersectionality and gender equality. This framework supported and directed the research to explore gender in relation to the three representations and the core themes of the research. Importantly, it facilitated a reflexive approach and concentrated on identifying future action that may be taken to assist wider gender equality goals.

## **Chapter five: methodology**

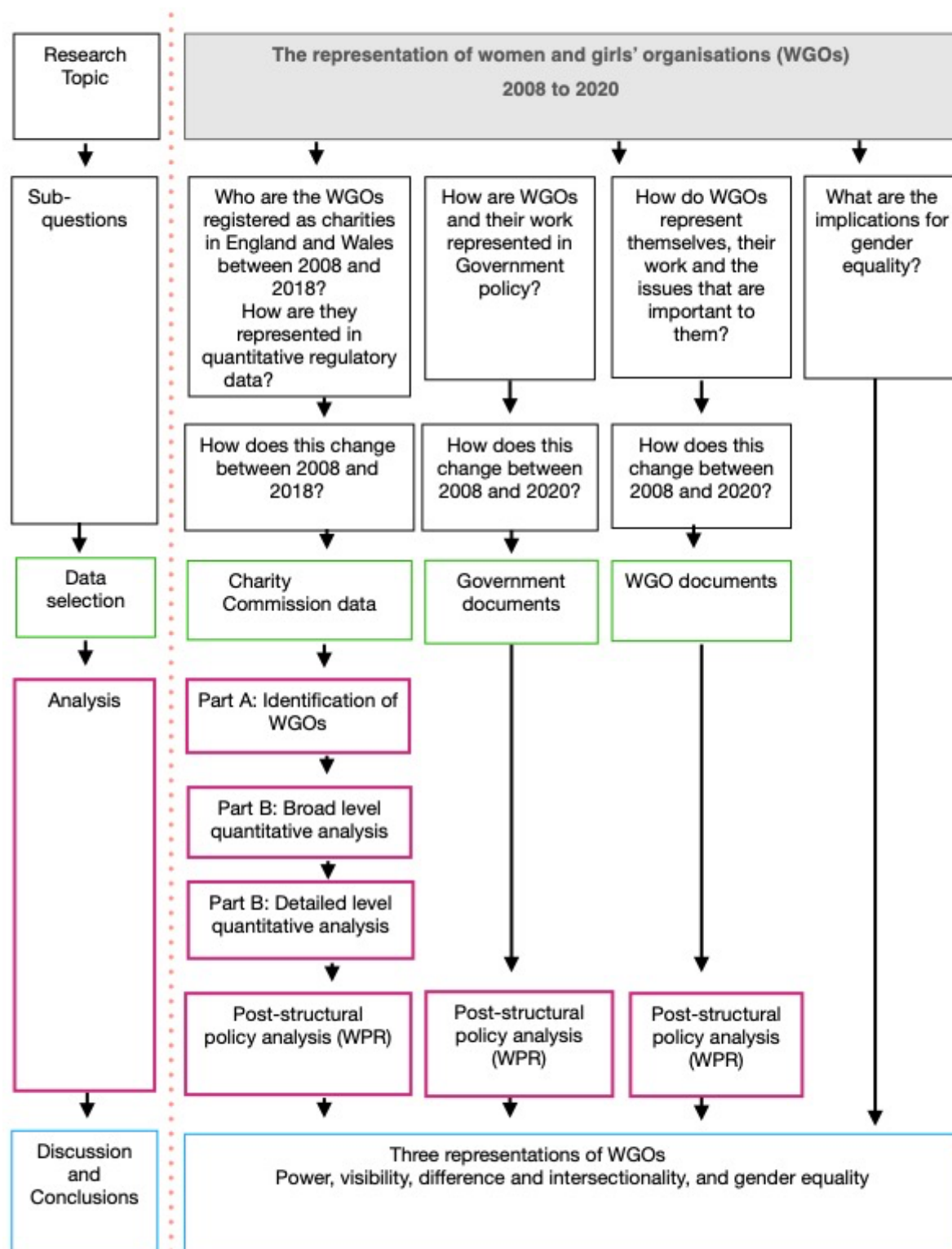
This chapter describes how the research was conducted and provides justification for the selected methods. First, a summary of the development of the research questions is outlined. Second, the mixed method methodology for the research is discussed. Third, the data selection methods for the quantitative research and qualitative research are presented. Fourth, there is an introduction to the 'What's the problem represented to be?'(WPR) analytical method. The chapter concludes with a summary of the approach to analysis.

### **5.1 Key stages of the research**

The figure below summarises the key stages of the research, demonstrating the progression from the research questions to the conclusions.



**Figure two: key stages of the research**



## **5.2 Research question development**

The literature review identified that 2008 to 2020<sup>5</sup> is a period of particular interest for women, the voluntary sector and women and girls organisations (WGOs). Key developments during that period included austerity, shifts to state-voluntary sector relations and the increased use of service commissioning models over grant provision. Social changes such as an increased interest in gender, ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG) and racial inequality, coupled with crises from the climate crisis to the global COVID-19 pandemic, have also characterised this period. These phenomena have created additional difficulties for and raised important questions about women and girls, the voluntary sector, WGOs and the organisations that support them. Yet little is known about WGOs as a whole and it has not been possible to readily track important changes across the landscape of WGOs, which has important implications for work supporting women with the consequences of gender inequality.

The theoretical framework has focused attention on visibility, power, difference and intersectionality, and gender equality. A methodology is required that can appropriately operationalise this framework. The literature review and the feminist post-structural framework led to the formation of several specific research questions that this thesis addresses:

1. Who are the WGOs registered as charities in England and Wales between 2008 and 2018<sup>6</sup> and how are they represented in quantitative regulatory data?
2. How are WGOs and their work represented in Government policy between 2008 and 2020?
3. How do WGOs represent themselves, their work and the issues that are important to them between 2008 and 2020?
4. How do each of the above representations (questions 1,2,3) change over the time period?
5. What are the implications of these representations for gender equality?

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<sup>5</sup> See further discussion of limits on the data analysis on p77-78.

<sup>6</sup> Due to limitations of the regulatory data the quantitative analysis focuses on 2008 to 2018. This is explained further below.

It is important to note that there is a shift here between WGOs and a focus on WGOs that are registered charities. The focus on only registered charities in the quantitative analysis is due to the limitations of information available and the difficulties of including the full scope of all WGO organisations in the quantitative analysis. This is explained further below, as it has implications for the visibility of WGOs.

To be able to answer these research questions, this study combines diverse approaches, conceptualised as three different representations. The first is a quantitative representation of WGOs that are registered charities, the second a qualitative analysis of government policy documents, comprised of both a selection relating to the wider VCS and a selection specifically to WGOs, and the third a qualitative analysis of WGO documents.

The first research question asks, 'who are the WGOs registered as charities in England and Wales between 2008 and 2018?' An exercise in mapping and categorising the number, types and locations of organisations relies on a quantitative method because, as outlined in the literature review, there is no existing dataset on WGOs and it would not be feasible to describe every WGO individually. It also provides us with a specific opportunity to reflect critically on a quantitative based model of representation as it is created and the consequences of this for WGOs. The second question focuses on how WGOs and their work are represented by government through policy documents and the third question how WGOs themselves represent their work and the issues that are important to them.

Question four ensures that we consider changes between 2008 and 2020, in recognition of the lack of fixity and the constant movement within the social, political, and economic framework and the organisations themselves. This is addressed in each of the separate analyses. Question five focuses attention on what the consequences of the findings may be, returning to the feminist commitment to practical action to reflect on how gender equality could be progressed.

### **5.3 Mixed method research**

This study uses two methods to answer the research questions – a quantitative analysis and documentary analysis - which together provide an opportunity to explore different ways of progressing feminist research.

The documentary analysis operationalises the theoretical framework's focus on discourse as an important site of the construction of representations and has a record of being used in previous feminist post-structural research (Gavey 1989, Lazar 2007). Quantitative methods in feminist research have been used less frequently because of their connection to positivist positions. In this study, the quantitative methods are devices that are being utilised to answer the research questions but deployed in a reflexive and critical manner. It is argued that using them does not necessitate a theoretical commitment to positivism. As Hesse-Biber notes:

“The method is but the tool; the methodology determines the way in which the tool will be utilized.” (Hesse-Biber 2010, p17).

The methodology focuses on different representations and each entails data that may offer a different view. None can be seen as entirely complete or entirely objective and the approach is therefore in line with Bacchi's view that:

“The tools of research should reflect the post-structural approach through a resistance to fixity and being open to dispute and revision.” (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p23).

Dhamoon makes a similar point in relation to the consequences of intersectionality for methodology.

“An intersectionality-type framework reveals that knowledge about difference and power is inevitably incomplete and partial and thus a singular project or method is simply inadequate to address all of the complexities of a matrix of meaning-making. Instead, there is value in simultaneously deploying complementary quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods that are grounded in social constructivism.” (Dhamoon 2011, p239).

The feminist rejection of binaries would also call for a re-evaluation of the simplistic quantitative versus qualitative debate to reflect on how different methods can be co-utilised for the same aims. In place of a wholesale rejection

of quantitative methods as too 'positivist', it is important to explore and deconstruct them to reveal the inherent subjectivity, emphasising that all knowledge is partial and situated (Haraway 1988).

Within critical voluntary sector studies in the UK, qualitative methods remain primary. Coule et al., (2022) reviewed non-profit literature in three leading international non-profit journals. They identified that there has been an increase in methodological conservatism across the time of their review. They suggest that there has been an increased alignment with positivist approaches and a lack of inclusion of more diverse, creative, and critically aligned methods. This study offers a contribution which uses a novel methodology combining quantitative and qualitative research that demonstrates the use of quantitative methods from a specifically feminist perspective alongside documentary analysis. Furthermore, this study pursued a reflexive methodology that sought to critique and explicitly acknowledge its limitations.

It is argued here that quantitative studies could be enhanced through a 'data feminist' approach which calls for recognition of and engagement with gender as a key category. Data feminism, as developed by D'Ignazio and Klein (2020) outlines how a feminist approach to data can be undertaken based on the seven key principles shown in Table one below.

These principles echo many of the themes raised in this study and demonstrate that quantitative research methods can be adapted and used within a feminist framework to powerful effect. This thesis has drawn on these seven principles.

**Table one: seven principles of data feminism**

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Application in this research</b>
<b>Examine power</b>	"Analysing how power operates in the world"	The theme of power is a central tenet of this research as outlined in the theoretical framework.
<b>Challenge power</b>	"Commits to challenging unequal power structures and working toward justice"	Consider how the research can be used to challenge inequalities.
<b>Elevate embodiment and emotion</b>	"Teaches us to value multiple forms of knowledge, including the knowledge that comes from people as living, feeling bodies in the world"	The issue of gender inequality is not an abstract concept. It has lived effects for women and the organisations that support them and acknowledgement of these effects needs to be included in the research.
<b>Rethink binaries and hierarchies</b>	"Challenge the gender binary, along with other systems of counting and classification that perpetuate oppression".	A lack of counting of women's organisations renders them less visible and means less recognition and access to resources. Attempting to quantify and classify organisations (while problematic) is important to address these issues.
		Acknowledging difficulties with binary understandings of gender.
		Recognising challenges of classification and making visible decision-making.
		Acknowledging and raising awareness of the difficulties of a binary understanding of WGOs.
<b>Embrace pluralism</b>	"The most complete knowledge comes from synthesising multiple perspectives, with priority given to local, indigenous and experiential ways of knowing"	Mixed methods research to allow multiple perspectives but privileging the voices of WGOs who have lived experience of being a WGO organisation and supporting women and girls.
<b>Consider context</b>	"Data are not neutral or objective. They are the products of unequal social relations, and this context is essential for conducting accurate ethical analysis."	Recognise and make visible the creation, decision-making and exclusions in the data as far as possible.
<b>Make labour visible</b>	"The work of data science, like all work in the world, is the work of many hands. Data feminism makes this labor visible so that it can be recognised and valued."	Acknowledge where support and time has been given to this research. Share results and data produced to facilitate further work.

D'ignazio and Klein's work is drawn from feminist intersectional thought which runs through their seven core principles. In line with a commitment to a feminist approach this study also explicitly uses principles of intersectionality. This approach is used to consider the ways in which different WGOs supporting women facing additional disadvantages may have travelled a path that differs from other WGOs, because of the additional structural inequalities they face. This study includes a finer grain of detail about WGOs so that we can view not just the nature of their work but also the intersection of this with different types of beneficiaries. For example, it shows not just data about refuges but also moves to a more detailed view of refuges specifically offering support to women from Black and minoritised backgrounds, to highlight these differences.

Greene et al. (1989) identify 5 reasons why mixed method approaches may be chosen (triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation, and expansion). Triangulation seeks convergence and corroboration from different methods. Complementarity seeks elaboration or enhancement from one method with the results of another method. Development seeks to use the results from one method to develop or inform another. Initiation seeks the discovery of paradox or contradiction, and expansion seeks to extend the breadth and range of inquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components (Greene et al. 1989, p259).

For this research, a *breadth of inquiry* is needed to be able first to create a dataset of WGOs that can be analysed, second to analyse the dataset and third allow an exploration of documents to explore the representations they create. Such an approach necessitates a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Importantly, the aim here is not to 'triangulate' the data in a quest for a 'single truth' and convergence but to provide an exploration of the different representations that result from the variety of methods. As Silverman notes, convergence would be contradictory in that:

"If you treat social reality as constructed in different ways in different contexts, then you cannot appeal to a single 'phenomenon' which all our data apparently represents." (Silverman 2017, p125).

#### **5.4 Dataset and method selection: quantitative research**

To answer the question of ‘who are WGOs that are registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales between 2008 and 2018?’ it was necessary to identify an appropriate method and dataset. There is no single dataset that would be able to provide a complete list of all voluntary sector organisations. Voluntary sector organisations in the UK can take a variety of forms, from registered charities to registered housing providers, mutuals, registered companies and small unregistered organisations. It would be beyond the scope of this thesis to be able to identify all WGOs within the voluntary sector across the period and the data to do this does not exist. Within the WGO sector itself, some organisations maintain databases of members or affiliate organisations and some hold lists of sister organisations that they can refer women to. These also offer a limited picture of the field of women’s organisations.

Despite limitations, the register of Charities for England and Wales provides a strong starting point for identifying WGOs. The Charity Commission register provides the largest and most complete record of voluntary sector organisations and as such provides the most holistic option for providing an overview of the landscape of WGOs in England and Wales.

In addition, the Charity Commission register provides detailed information about each organisation which is more comprehensive than that available through alternatives such as the Companies House register. This is particularly important because there are no datasets available that specifically identify WGOs within them and so identification relies on keyword searches in textual data. In the UK Civil Society Almanac (NCVO 2021b), one of the key sources of statistics on the sector in the UK, WGOs are not identified due to the use of International Classification of Non-profit organisations (ICNPO) developed by Salamon and Anheier (1996). Nickel and Eikenberry note that the mapping previously undertaken frequently:

“Relies upon the use of the very common units of standard measurements and coding advocated by Salamon and others.” (Nickel and Eikenberry 2016, p404).

Importantly, this standard coding does not include WGOs.



More recent work by Damm and Kane (2021) has looked at alternative ways to identify and classify organisations using keywords and automated approaches. Building on their recognition that a more detailed system is needed that allows for assigning multiple relevant categories, an intersectional analysis is also important so that organisations can be understood in a more nuanced and less binary way.

It is therefore necessary to use the textual data, such as the information contained within the annual returns to the Charity Commission to identify potential organisations, in particular the name, objects and activities fields. A specific exploration of WGOs who are registered as charities, was therefore selected as the most appropriate type of organisation to explore for this research question.

There are further limitations, however, caused by the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. The rules for submitting annual returns to the Charity Commission were relaxed during the crisis. This has meant that data for 2019 and 2020 was affected and is not as consistent as previous years. For this reason, it was decided to cap the analysis in 2018, to offer a more consistent view. There would certainly be advantages in further research to explore the data from 2019 onwards for the impact of the COVID-19 crisis but this was considered beyond the scope of this project.<sup>7</sup>

### **5.5 Research process: quantitative research**

The quantitative research was conducted in three parts. Part A of the quantitative analysis required the identification of organisations. Part B required a dual analysis of the data. First a broad overview and second, a detailed intersectional analysis. Part C entailed the application of the post-structural policy analysis method. Parts A and B of the quantitative analysis are detailed below, followed by the qualitative analysis method. The post-structural policy analysis is explained at the end of the chapter since it was used across both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the research.

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<sup>7</sup> The author has subsequently been involved in a research project to explore funding to WGOs in 2021(Damm, Dowrick and Harris 2023).

### 5.5.1 Part A Identifying women and girls organisations

#### i) **Stage one: reviewing definitions of a WGO**

Bowker discusses two basic types of classification system – Aristotelian and prototype. The Aristotelian type relates to binary characteristics that classify objects based on whether they have the identified characteristics, while prototype theory, according to Rosch (1978) in Bowker relates to:

“A broad picture in our minds which is extended by metaphor and analogy when trying to decide if any given thing...counts.” (Bowker 1998, p256).

Bowker explains how, in practice:

“The classical beauty of the Aristotelian classification gives way to a fuzzier classification system that shares in practice key features with common sense prototype classifications.” (Bowker 1998, p258).

Feminist knowledge offers a critique of binary distinctions of mind/body, science/nature, reason/emotion and its allocation of those less valued distinctions to women (Harding 1986, hooks 2014). As such, an Aristotelian classification would be incongruous to an approach from a feminist perspective which points to the importance of pluralism and more complex understandings than either/or essentialist thinking. This research therefore moves away from trying to establish *the definition* of a women’s organisation and instead allows for a wider ‘field or landscape of organisations’. A landscape that takes account of the varying degrees to which organisations are run entirely by women as well as the different degrees to which they are ‘for women’ and gives greater visibility to the range of organisations who predominantly benefit women and their potential impact on gender equality. It also allows space to highlight how different viewpoints and approaches may provide nuanced and important differences in what is presented and the implications of this for the ‘landscape’ that is represented. There is, however, a limit to the stretching of a boundary of a WGO as the quantitative analysis ultimately necessitates a specific list of organisations that are included.

Key women’s organisations such as the Women’s Resource Centre have used the phrase “organisations for women, by women” (Women’s Resource Centre 2007) to describe women’s organisations and there is a sense in which this is

central to many WGOs, particularly many of those established from the period of second wave feminism onwards. There is a political commitment in describing them as such, that organisations *for* women should be run *by* women. A focus on “for women and by women” however, also leads to a very narrow understanding of WGOs. If adhered to strictly it would potentially exclude organisations that many would see as being key to a ‘women’s organisation sector’ using a ‘prototype’ approach, such as some organisations supporting people affected by domestic abuse. The delineations between organisations that are either by or for women, both, or neither, are in practice less clear than at first sight. The objects and activities of these charities sometimes state beneficiaries in gender neutral terms. As an example, one charity from the register states:

“The Charity is established to relieve distress and suffering amongst *people* living with or fleeing from, or at risk of, Domestic Abuse (emphasis added).” (Charity Commission 2019).

A focus on organisations for women and girls should also recognise and take account of the lack of a fixed definition of women as a category. The category of ‘woman’ itself is open to contestation as raised in chapter four. There are issues of gender identification which can be obscured by the use of the term ‘women and girls’. This study includes organisations who offer support beyond binary notions of gender within the analysis, recognising that they are also impacted by asymmetrical power relations according to gender identity. As Ahmed notes:

“In our collective feminist histories, the policing of who are “women” has been about how a specific group of women have secured their right to determine who belongs within feminism (whiteness being a key mechanism for policing feminism). The policing of the boundaries of “women” has never not been disastrous for feminism.” (Ahmed 2016, p30-31).

The broad view used in this study, along with the detailed sub-categories, also allows for the dataset to be used by others who may wish to make selections to create their own representations.

## **ii) Stage two: using keyword searches to identify potential WGOs**

Previous research (Dowrick 2018) identified WGOs in Yorkshire and Humber using the predominantly by and/or for women approach and through checking

individual Charity Commission records. From that study it was possible to generate a list of 50 relevant keywords for identifying WGOs from textual data. Relying purely on this list of words inevitably generates a large rate of false positive results, due to the frequent use of these keywords by organisations in general and who are not predominantly for women. In their objects or activities an organisation may for example, use a term such as the “Mother of God” referring to a religious organisation in their title, therefore matching the keyword “mother”. The keywords alone were not sufficient but a starting point. A further layer of analysis was therefore essential to make judgements about whether an organisation is ‘predominantly for women’, based on the descriptions in the text.

### **iii) Stage three: applying the definition to the list of potential WGOs**

The keyword search was applied in an automated process using SPSS<sup>8</sup>, to the dataset of registered charities (Charity Commission 2019). This identified a shortlist of 71,653 organisations that were potential WGOs from the full register of 373,021 records in the download. The shortlist was examined one by one to create a dataset of organisations that may be predominantly for the benefit of women or explicitly run by women. Taking ‘by’ and ‘for’ as starting points organisations were reviewed using the ‘objectives’, ‘name’ and ‘activities’ fields to decide whether they are predominantly ‘by’ and/or predominantly ‘for’ women and girls. For example, this would encompass whether the name of the organisation included women, such as the “Charity of Sarah Walton for Five Almswomen” (Charity Commission 2019) and/or the objects/activities describe the beneficiaries as predominantly women, such as: “The Le Personne Trust provides sheltered housing for the benefit of elderly needy women...” (Charity Commission 2019).

Schools that are registered charities were excluded from the final analysis, for several reasons. The first is that independent schools do not fit the NCVO general charities definition and they have been excluded from other similar research such as the NCVO almanac. The almanac has been used as a comparator for some of the findings below and therefore this exclusion ensures a more consistent approach. Second, the inclusion of schools, while not being commonly

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<sup>8</sup> SPSS is a Statistical software suite developed by IBM.

understood as VCS organisations, also changes the data significantly. Because they have much larger incomes than other organisations, they have a skewing effect on figures for the aggregate income of the sector, and for average incomes.

#### **iv) Stage four: reviewing and refining the process**

An iterative approach was used to move back and forth between the definition of the category and the organisations that were categorised. This led to adjustments and refinement of the boundaries of the category. As noted above, there was therefore a significant degree of subjective individual assessment and decision-making in the process of selecting what a 'women and girls' organisation may be. In line with the principles of data feminism, it is important to recognise the power of selecting which organisations to include/exclude, and the fact that these decisions may be both conscious and unconscious. Noting and examining these decisions wherever possible was important both for transparency and scrutiny, for exposing the power of the researcher in the process and the scope for assumptions and bias to shape how the boundaries move to encompass or exclude organisations. This issue of the role of the researcher is explored further in section 5.6.5 below and the discussion in chapter nine.

Part B of the analysis included two stages, a broad analysis of WGOs and a detailed intersectional analysis of specific organisations.

#### **5.5.2 Part B**

Accounts data for included organisations was supplied by NCVO and merged into the list of WGOs. This data included occasions where accounts were submitted by the same organisation twice in the same calendar year. Some of these may have been submitted in error, others may have changed their organisation's financial year end. There were also organisations with an accounting year with a year-end date of the 31<sup>st</sup> of December who may have submitted their accounts early so that they appear at the end of the same year. As it was not possible to distinguish between all the possible reasons, the first set of accounts submitted in each year was used for the analysis.

### **i) Stage one: a broad analysis of WGOs**

The broad profile of WGOs allowed exploration of an overall picture including the total income, number of organisations, size, the nature of their activities, location and key changes between 2008 and 2018.

This revealed the diversity in WGOs and the potential for key differences between organisations both across and within sub-categories. Following the principles of data feminism outlined above and the key issues raised in the literature review that suggested specific groups who are not visible at a sector wide level, may face additional disadvantage, it was important to explore the data in further detail to identify these nuances in a second stage of analysis.

### **ii) Stage two: a detailed analysis of specific WGOs**

A specific group of WGOs was selected for more detailed exploration. Recognising that all sub-categories could provide important information (but limited by the scale of a doctoral study), the focus was on groups that are explicitly providing support for women facing additional disadvantage and those organisations focused on gender equality as they are central to the themes of this research.

The selected sub-categories were those WGOs who are registered charities whose work is centred on: Black and minoritised women and girls, women affected by the criminal justice system, women with disabilities, lone parents, gender identity and sexuality, general welfare, supporting sex workers and gender equality.

Other key sub-categories such as health, social organisations, giving to others, funding and resources, housing, education and employment and sports and arts are therefore not discussed in further detail. The implications of this are explored further in chapter nine.

## **5.6 Qualitative research**

### **5.6.1 Data and method selection: qualitative research**

The qualitative research was conducted in two parts. The first required the identification of government policy documents and the second identified specific

WGOs and their documents. All the documents were analysed using the 'What's the problem represented to be?' (WPR) post-structural policy analysis method developed by Bacchi (2009) which is explained at the end of this chapter.

To answer questions around representations of WGOs and their work, several different approaches were considered. Initial explorations reviewed the benefits and disadvantages of conducting interviews with WGO and government representatives, but several factors suggested that this may not be the most appropriate method for this research. First, in seeking to look at 'representations' from WGOs about their work, and what issues are important to them, documents provide us with *one* insight into the thoughts and messages that organisations wished to convey at a particular point in time. These messages are also directed at a specific audience. In this way they offer indicators of the issues that they understood as important and that they wished to highlight (and those that they do not) for a specific audience and at a specific time.

In contrast, asking interviewees to consider their thoughts and actions or those of others in the organisation, at several points throughout 2008 and 2020, would not be easy or possible for them to recall and as such may not provide as specific an account of the past but would provide an alternative and different account. Interviews would have entailed drawing on the limited time available to those working in WGOs to ask them to articulate their thoughts on issues which have already been made explicit elsewhere. It was felt that it would not be the most ethical approach, given their limited time resources, particularly during the very resource intensive and stress filled environment of the COVID-19 public health crisis. Importantly, written documents also provide access to an existing reserve of data to reflect on shifting discourse across time and differing actors. Taking into consideration all these elements, this study selected secondary data analysis of WGO and government policy documents as the main qualitative method.

### **5.6.2 Research process: qualitative research**

The mapping process enabled a view of WGOs who are registered charities across both England and Wales. However, due to the devolved government arrangements in place in Wales and the subsequent different policy environments it was not possible to consider both England and Wales in the qualitative

research, as this would have necessitated a detailed analysis of the different policy contexts. This task would have been beyond the scope of a study of this size. The qualitative aspect of this study therefore focuses only on WGOs in England.

**i) Part A Government policy document selection**

There were three key drivers for the selection of government policy documents. The first was to identify documents that described and were aimed at wider VCS-government relations, to investigate how WGOs are discussed within the broader context of the VCS. The second was to identify documents from across government where links and/or references to WGOs and their work could be found. This was inevitably more difficult as WGOs address a wide range of needs for women, from support with specific issues such as health or social isolation through to campaigning for societal change and greater gender equality. It was important, therefore, to consider how to select government policy documents that could reflect this diversity, in line with the different kinds of organisations that exist. A decision was made to focus on (a) policy areas where there has been a level of activity and policy interest, (b) gender equality policy, as a central theme of the research and (c) where there is overlap with the needs of some of the most disadvantaged women. The areas of ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG), women affected by the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and gender equality were therefore selected. Third, it was also important to select a range of documents produced across the period to address the research question about change.

The study identified three documents related to a wider government-VCS strategy, followed by a further nine documents in which WGOs are discussed in relation to policy areas of EVAWG (five documents), women affected by the CJS (two documents) and gender equality (two documents). The selected documents are outlined in the table two below. Summary descriptions of each document are also available in appendix one for a more detailed overview of the key themes contained within them.



**Table two: selected government policy documents relating to the VCS.**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Author and Year</b>
<b>VCS</b>	Building the Big Society	Cabinet Office (2010)
	Civil Society Strategy	Cabinet Office (2018)
	Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant (The Kruger Report)	Kruger, D. (2020)
<b>EVAWG</b>	Tackling violence against women a cross government narrative	Government Equalities Office (2008)
	Call to end violence against women and girls 2010 to 2015 Government policy: violence against women and girls (2011)	Home Office (2011)
	Ending violence against women and girls strategy 2016-2020	Home Office (2016)
	Ending violence against women and girls 2016-2020 strategy refresh	Home Office (2019)
	Transforming the response to Domestic Abuse Consultation Response and Draft Bill	Home Office and Ministry of Justice (2019)
<b>CJS</b>	Delivering the Government response to the Corston Report	Ministry of Justice (2008)
	The Female Offender strategy	Ministry of Justice (2018)
<b>Gender equality</b>	The Equality Strategy- Building a Fairer Britain	Government Equalities Office (2010)
	Gender Equality at every stage: a roadmap for change	Government Equalities Office (2019)

## ii) **Part B WGO document selection**

Selecting documents from WGO organisations presented two main difficulties in this stage of the qualitative analysis: identifying which WGOs to focus on and which of their documents to analyse. Attempting to capture the scale and variety of both organisations and documents was challenging.

In addressing the first, which organisations to focus on, the sub-categories of organisations from the quantitative analysis were reviewed to consider how to capture the diversity of themes effectively. It was also important to consider how the different types of organisations that have been particularly affected during this period, could be included as well as how to encompass those which are more frequently the subject of analysis and debate, compared to those that are less so.

Initially, a selection process was trialled which included individual organisations that reflected the full range of categories, sizes, locations, and differing trajectories over the time period. This list was, however, too extensive and to do it justice would require more resources than the scope of this study could allow. This was compounded by the fact that some organisations produce more literature than others and trying to find organisations that could fulfil the criteria above while keeping within the time frame and space for this part of the study was problematic.

A different approach was therefore taken, to think about how the different ‘voices’ and ‘representations’ of organisations already come together. Larger representative bodies of women’s sector organisations already collate and provide a *voice or representation* (notably one of many potential different voices) for smaller and similar organisations. They also often work with the organisations they represent to try and capture the views and experiences of the women they support, are more actively involved in trying to shape the landscape of the sector and are usually at the centre of responding to Government policy and gender equality issues. This study therefore focuses on a small range of larger organisations from across different categories of WGOs, in particular organisations with a membership or representative role wherever possible, as a source of data for analysis. Efforts were particularly made to identify organisations working in the same sub-categories as the government policy

selection to allow a view of how they may be 'in conversation with one another' and to again focus attention on organisations working with some of the women facing additional disadvantages and gender equality.

The selected organisations, a self-description and, where applicable, details of the organisations that they represent are provided in table three below. In relation to the second challenge of which of their documents to select, a range of factors were important. To capture representations which may be more dominant, documents were selected which have been widely circulated, promoted or referenced by the organisations themselves or by other women's organisations, along with documents which may be in response to a specific government policy or issue. Documents were again selected from across the time range (2008-2020) and a goal of a minimum of three documents per organisation was set to provide a reflection over time. Table four below shows the documents that were selected for analysis from each organisation. A summary of each document is also available in appendix three.

**Table three: WGO organisation selection**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Membership</b>
Imkaan	“Imkaan acts as a bridge between government, statutory agencies, mainstream voluntary organisations and the specialist BME ending VAWG sector to promote effective and appropriate inclusion of BME women’s and girls’ experiences and needs within policy and programming. This includes challenging the marginalising and stigmatising ways that policy narratives are constructed, and pushing back against the erosion of safe, autonomous BME led spaces. This is particularly important for smaller, local organisations whose voices are often the least heard, even at local level.” (2018, p7).	Membership is comprised of a range of ending violence against women and girl organisations.
Women’s Aid	“Women’s Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. Over the past 45 years, Women’s Aid has been at the forefront of shaping and co-ordinating responses to domestic abuse through practice, research and policy. We empower survivors by keeping their voices at the heart of our work, working with and or women and children by listening to them and responding to their needs. We are a federation of nearly 80 organisations which provide just under 300 local lifesaving services to women and children across the country.” (Davidge 2020, p2).	Women’s Aid refuges across England
Women’s Resource Centre	“WRC is a unique charity that 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 try to educate 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 health, violence against women and girls, 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 approximately 20,000 women’s organisations across the country serving millions of women every year.” (2018a, p3)	Membership network of women’s organisations
Women in prison	“Women in Prison (WIP) is a women-only organisation that provides holistic gender-specialist support to women affected by the criminal justice system. We work in prisons, in the community and “through the gate”, supporting women leaving prison. We run three women’s centres...Our combined services provide women with support around advocacy, complex needs, domestic and sexual violence, education, training and employment, mental health, parenting and substance misuse. We advocate for a significant reduction in the number of women being sent to prison and for strengthened community support services.” (2017a, p2).	Not a membership organisation.
The Fawcett Society	“The Fawcett Society is the UK’s leading membership charity campaigning for gender equality and women’s rights at work, at home and in public life. Our vision is a society in which women and girls in all their diversity are equal and truly free to fulfil their potential creating a stronger, happier, better future for us all...We’ve been advancing women’s equality since 1866 when at just 19, Millicent Fawcett collected signatures on a petition for women’s votes.” (The Fawcett Society 2023)	Individual membership organisation

**Table four: WGO document selection**

	<b>Document</b>	<b>Year and author</b>
<b>Imkaan</b>	A right to exist	Imkaan (2008)
	Beyond the labels	Imkaan (2013)
	Capital losses	Imkaan (2016)
	Survival to sustainability	Imkaan (2018)
	The impact of the dual pandemics	Banga and Roy (2020)
<b>Women's Aid</b>	Women's Aid Annual Survey 2009-10	Barron (2011)
	A growing crisis of unmet need	Taylor (2013)
	SOS Save refugees save lives	Women's Aid (2014)
	Funding specialist support for domestic abuse survivors	Davidge (2019)
	A Perfect Storm: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Domestic Abuse Survivors and the Services Supporting Them	Davidge (2020)
<b>Women's Resource Centre</b>	Hidden Value: demonstrating the extraordinary impact of women's voluntary & community organisations	WRC (2011)
	Surviving the crisis: the impact of public spending cuts on women's voluntary and community organisations	WRC (date unknown)
	Hearing women's voices: Why women?	WRC (2018)
	Life-changing and life-saving funding for the women's sector	WRC (2018)
	The crisis of Covid-19 and UK women's charities	WRC (2020)
<b>Women in Prison</b>	Home truths: Housing for women in the criminal justice system	Women in Prison (2016)
	A response to the justice Select committee inquiry into the Government's Transforming Rehabilitation Programme	Women in Prison (2017a)
	A response to the Justice Select Committee: Prison population 2022: planning for the future inquiry	Women in Prison (2017b)
	HM Government Transforming the response to domestic abuse: supporting female offenders section	Women in Prison (2018)
<b>The Fawcett Society</b>	Keeping mum	The Fawcett Society (2008)
	Who has that? Women's perceptions of equality in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century	The Fawcett Society (2012b)
	Where are women's voices on the economy?	The Fawcett Society (2015)
	Where's the benefit?	Ariss et al. (2015)
	Exiting lockdown the impact on women	The Fawcett Society (2020)

### 5.6.3 Post-structural policy analysis: what's the problem represented to be?

As outlined in the theoretical framework, an analysis of all data sources requires an approach which pays attention to the assumptions and construction of the arguments in the documents. The methodology selected for this study uses the 'what's the problem represented to be?' (WPR) post-structural policy analysis approach established by Bacchi (2009) and informed by the work of Foucault. WPR is the part C of the quantitative analysis and is the analysis method for both of the qualitative elements. It therefore spans across all three representations. It is designed specifically to aid thinking about how problems are represented, what is unsaid, whose voice and what knowledge is privileged, and the effects of the policy problematisation on people's lives. The questions also invite reflection on what could be different and encourage reflexivity in developing any new proposals for change. The method developed by Bacchi is operationalised through seven key steps or questions that are asked of any policy and these are shown in figure three below.

**Figure three: what's the problem represented to be?**

#### **What's the problem represented to be? (WPR) approach to policy analysis**

1. What's the problem (e.g., of "gender equality", "drug use/abuse", "economic development", "global warming" etc) represented to be in a specific policy or policies?
2. What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem" (*problem representation*)?
3. How has this representation of the "problem" come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the "problem" be conceptualized differently?
5. What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the "problem"?
6. How and where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?
7. Apply this list of questions to your own problem representations.

Adapted from Bacchi, C. (2009) *Analysing Policy: What's the problem represented to be?* Pearson Education, Frensham Forest.

(Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p20)

Existing research has demonstrated that the WPR method can be a powerful tool for bringing new insight into policy analysis. Bacchi has used the approach herself to consider a range of policy initiatives including health policies (2016, 2018) highlighting how the WPR approach can be used to interrogate problem representation. WPR has also been used successfully in a range of feminist studies. For example, Payne's analysis of women's health policy in the UK identified how the 'problem' reinforces ideas about women and men as essentially different, obscuring the impact of structural inequality and focusing instead on 'technocratic solutions' (Payne 2014, p970). WPR therefore has existing credibility and suitability within the field of feminist research.

Foucault has received criticism for an ambiguous understanding of power as potentially 'normatively neutral' (Fraser 1981). In her translation of a Foucauldian approach to WPR, however, Bacchi encourages specific reflection on 'deleterious consequences' (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p45) and in so doing acknowledges that some effects may be more or less desirable for certain groups. Bacchi also encourages reflection on concentrations of power and differential power relations that 'create forms of authority for certain knowledges' (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p22). There is therefore a 'good fit' between the aims of this research with a focus on both different forms of power and the ways in which some voices have more authority and others are quiet or absent.

A number of alternative methods of analysis were considered but were deemed less appropriate for this study. For example, a content analysis approach would not be able to pay sufficient attention to the assumptions and construction of the arguments within the text. Discourse analysis was also considered as an alternative approach that is similarly focused on implied meaning and power within discourse but was also disregarded because it lacked the specific structure of the post-structural policy analysis approach that facilitates comparison across varied sources. WPR encourages the application of a set of specific questions to documents which can be applied in a variety of settings. The post-structural policy analysis approach provided a specific framework and set of questions to apply to different data sources, creating consistency and increased transparency in the development of the findings.

The WPR methodology enabled critical reflection on *both the quantitative and qualitative representations* in this mixed method study. The theoretical framework for this study required a methodology that could consider, explore and acknowledge a process of creating a representation of ‘women and girl’s organisations’ through quantitative analysis. WPR was applied in this study to explore this construction more critically. No other previous examples were found of the approach being used in this way, and it may therefore represent the first time it has been used with a quantitative analysis. This is important because it has been acknowledged that the process of dataset creation is not neutral but subjective. As Tong states neither science nor language are objective. They are both ‘constructed’ knowledge:

“Science is no more objective than politics or ethics, both of which are subjective, contextual, historical, contingent, and almost always deployed to serve self-interest.” (Tong 2013, p194).

It was necessary therefore to ensure that the approach allows for a reflexive and critical analyses that can uncover and reflect on this process of construction. The post-structural policy analysis approach developed by Bacchi (2009) was best suited to this task.

In order to facilitate the WPR analysis, a template guide that focuses on the WPR questions and includes the suggested sub-questions and prompts from Bacchi and Goodwin’s detailed book on the method (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016) was developed and used as the basis for the analysis of the documents. This is shown in appendix four in a completed example of its use. For this study the question “Are there gendered assumptions?” was also added to this template to increase the focus on the gender dimension to the research.

#### **5.6.4 Overall analysis framework for discussion**

While each representation was analysed and discussed as an individual aspect of the research, it was also important to reflect across the representations and to consider what the implications of the different representations *as a whole* may be for gender equality.



In moving forward with the overall analysis of the three representations, the discussion chapter (chapter nine) brings the findings together 'in conversation with one another'. Hesse-Biber proposes that:

“At the data analysis stage, the findings...are in conversation with one another and appear to weave a richer and more complex story. Researchers may juxtapose the findings from each study and can interrogate the findings from one study to help understand the findings from the other.” (Hesse-Biber 2010, p67).

The conversation in this study is focused on the overarching themes of the research - visibility, power, difference and intersectionality and gender equality - that were introduced in chapter four, to explore what implications there may be for progressing gender equality based on the findings.

#### **5.6.5 Ethical considerations**

This study was approved by Sheffield Hallam University Ethics Committee prior to commencement. The formal ethical approval, however, is just one consideration in the research as the importance of ethical and professional standards requires consideration throughout the whole process of research and dissemination.

In considering the balance of good to harm that could arise with this study, it was necessary to return to the potential for harm outlined at the start. To what extent will the surfacing of a map of women's charitable organisations provide a tool for control? In registering with the Charity Commission, organisations are already subject to control (and as such gain access to resources) and the potential for mapping from any source, although the creation of this dataset will arguably make this more accessible.

There are, however, wider positive gains, as the information can be made available to women's organisations for their use and reference. The ability to be able to track changes and have alternative representations of women's organisations offers possibilities for lobbying for resources and capturing historical developments. It offers the opportunity for women's charitable organisations to be 'as visible' as other sectors and in this way allow greater consideration of women's organisations as a group.

The documents that were analysed are in the public domain and do not therefore require individual consent. However, as the data is secondary it can be argued that it is being used for a purpose that is different from its original one. The documents are in the public domain and are meant for public use, they are also considered and constructed documents that have been produced by the organisations for a specific purpose. Often this purpose has been raising awareness about gender equality issues and their work. The use of the documents in this research is in line with those aims.

Efforts have been made to ensure that the identification of women's charitable organisations is as comprehensive as possible and that organisations are correctly labelled and categorised to avoid misrepresentation and inaccuracies in the findings. Care has also been taken to explain findings and their limitations to avoid misinterpretation as far as possible, in line with British Sociological Association guidance which advises that researchers:

“...safeguard the proper interests of those involved in or affected by their work, and...share their analyses/report their findings accurately and truthfully.” (British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice 2017, p4).

Throughout the study, care has been taken to highlight where there are omissions and where for example organisations are not included in the selection and analysis. From deconstructing the process of creating a quantitative dataset, to the analysis of documents and discussion chapters, the aim has been to be mindful of the consequences of the use of discourse in this study through the construction of terms, arguments and presentation of findings (Davies et al. 2004).

An audit trail of key decisions relating to the process of identifying organisations has been maintained. A chart of the quantitative process to allow for scrutiny and replicability has been produced and is available in appendix five.

Mapping work has been an important part of the process and has entailed careful concealment of the addresses of particularly vulnerable groups such as organisations supporting women with EAWG. While addresses are available on

the Charity Commission and other websites and usually organisations provide anonymised post office box addresses, care has been taken to use proxy locations where Post Office box addresses were not in use.

It has been the overall intention of this study that ethical consideration and reflexivity are used throughout the research, as a continuous process and that it continues beyond the completion of the study, to its dissemination and future purpose.

### **5.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter has outlined the research questions for the study, and the selected mixed method methodology. It has demonstrated the development of the methodology, its 'fit' with the theoretical framework and research, and its suitability to answer the research questions. The chapter has highlighted a number of difficulties caused by a lack of available comprehensive data, difficulties with the process of selecting appropriate documents for analysis, and how these were overcome.

The principles of a feminist approach to quantitative research were explained and the WPR approach was introduced and discussed in detail as a method to bring the different strands of research together.

Finally, the overall process of analysis for all of the three representations was presented, followed by the important ethical considerations for this study. Having laid out the framework of the study, the next three chapters (six, seven and eight) detail the findings from the research, followed by a discussion in chapter nine.

## **Chapter six: Who are the Women and Girls Organisations (WGOs) registered as charities in England and Wales between 2008 and 2018? How are they represented in quantitative regulatory data? How does this change between 2008 and 2018?**

The review of existing literature identified a paucity of quantitative data relating to women and girls organisations (WGOs). Little systematic evidence is available concerning how many WGOs there are, where they are located, their size, the nature of their work and what changes may have taken place during a period identified as being particularly challenging.

As outlined in chapter five (methodology), for the quantitative analysis, this part of the study focuses specifically on WGOs that are registered charities and who make up a significant proportion of the sector (for whom data is available). This chapter addresses the following research questions in two parts. Part one focuses on who are the WGOs registered as charities in England and Wales between 2008 and 2018? Part two of the chapter addresses - how are they represented in quantitative regulatory data and how does this change between 2008 and 2018?

This is undertaken with two goals in mind. The first is to create and explore the data using a feminist quantitative approach, incorporating an intersectional analysis and the second to expose and critique *the process of identifying* WGOs and locating the possible boundaries of a WGO landscape. As there was no current representation available it was necessary to create a representation of WGOs using the available regulatory data. This representation provided a view of who WGOs are, where they are and their work. It also facilitated the identification of 'problem representations' that were found through the data analysis, using the 'What's the problem represented to be? (WPR)' approach (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016) articulated in the methodology in chapter five.

Question seven from the WPR approach (apply this list of questions to your own problem representations) is put into practice. Question one (what is the problem represented to be?) and question three (how has this representation of the

‘problem’ come about?), generate a number of specific problem representations based on the data analysis, that are discussed in this chapter. Question six (how and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended?) is less pertinent here, as the problem representation lies within this study and is not part of a broader policy proposal. It is important however to reflect on the potential for the problems to be disseminated further, and this is discussed in chapter nine. Question two (what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem” ?), question four (what is left unproblematic?) and question five (what effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?) therefore form the main basis of the analysis in this chapter.

As outlined above, the chapter now proceeds in two sections. The first provides findings on the process of identifying WGOs within the Charity Commission dataset. The second addresses how WGOs are represented and how does this change. The ‘problems’ are then explored in ‘conversation’ with the other two representations that follow in the next chapters (seven and eight).

### **6.1 Who are the WGOs registered as charities in England and Wales between 2008 and 2018? Identifying WGOs within regulatory data**

Chapter two drew attention to the difficulties of defining a voluntary and community sector (VCS) and this was extended to identify comparative issues with defining WGOs. Chapter four pointed to the importance of acknowledging flux, gender and intersectionality. Chapter five outlined key practical obstacles with identifying WGOs due to the limitations of the Charity Commission register itself. These issues all necessitated finding at least a temporary ‘solution’ in order to progress the study and arrive at a *representation* of WGOs.

To achieve this, a number of temporary ‘positions’ were adopted in line with a ‘strategic essentialism’ approach proposed by Spivak (1988). The first of these is the use of the term ‘woman’ accepting its contested nature. Second a broader multi-dimensional landscape view of WGOs using ‘predominantly by *and/or* for women and girls’ was used as a basis for identifying organisations. Third, the use of the Charity Commission Register as a dataset, recognising its limited view of

the VCS as a whole. Fourth, undertaking a quantitative analysis with a focus on a feminist approach that is reflexive and reveals and acknowledges its limitations.

Adding to the discussions in the previous chapters and as a result of completing a process of identification along these lines, eight key insights arose in relation to *creating* a representation of WGOs (as opposed to what that representation conveys) each of which are discussed below.

First, in exploring WGOs that are registered as charities, it has been possible to identify a range of organisations that may not explicitly be ‘for women’ but which on closer examination predominantly benefit women and have therefore been included in this representation. For example, this would include organisations that support lone parents who are often mostly supporting women, since women constitute the majority (around 86 per cent) of lone parents (Dromey et al. 2020).

Second, while it has not been possible to identify organisations by the gender of their board or leadership due to a lack of publicly recorded data in this area, it is likely that boards of included organisations may not be exclusively comprised of women. According to a report by NCVO (2019) men are more likely to have led an organisation or been a trustee or member of a committee (22 vs 19 per cent). Even though women comprise the majority (68 per cent) of the work force in third sector organisations. Women were also more likely than men to have formally volunteered at least once in the last year (37 vs 34 per cent) and to have volunteered frequently (27 vs 25 per cent) (NCVO 2019). Again, this may be best seen as a range from organisations who may only have women on the board and leadership to those with just one or two non-women board members or those with a majority of non-women members. In this way, it is possible to see that there are organisations which may be closer or further away from the concept of ‘by women’. Organisations who *predominantly benefit* women were defined as within the scope of this representation, even if it was unclear who was leading the organisation. The use of the term ‘predominantly’ is deliberately loose because it was not possible to identify a specific percentage or number due to the limitations of the data.

Third, there are also organisations led by women but for a range of other beneficiaries such as Inner Wheel organisations, which are women led and

organised but fundraise for a range of charitable causes. These organisations were identified through their charitable aims and objects as being 'women led' organisations and were included within the scope of this study. There may be organisations that are women-led but did not include reference to this within their name, charitable objects or activities. As such, these organisations were excluded from the representation offered here.

Fourth, there is not a universal 'woman' to whom all organisations for women can benefit. An exploration of the Charity Commission data reveals that women's organisations can serve different purposes and agendas and are not neutral or apolitical. While all organisations that meet the 'predominantly by and for' criteria are included in this representation, it is important to reflect and consider in more detail which 'women' are leading the organisation and which women are intended to benefit. This is explored further in the discussion in chapter nine.

Fifth, a focus on describing themselves as 'by and for' women or describing themselves as a WGO may also be to signal alignment within a wider group of WGOs where there may be strong historical roots or connections, a shared identity and common purpose. It is also a means of accessing recognition and resources as a group, for example, where funding may be allocated for 'women's organisations'. Use of non-gender specific terms such as 'people' may lead to a separation or exclusion from the group, similarly, using exclusively the language of 'women and girls' may have exclusionary effects on people who identify as non-binary. This choice of language may be conscious or unconscious but the issue of how organisations are represented and represent themselves has lived effects and can affect both the organisation and those it seeks to support or not. Organisations which had a generic term such as 'people' in place of 'women and girls' but whose purposes and aims were predominantly for women, were included in the scope of this representation.

There is also the risk of stretching the concept of a WGO too far. It is known that women form the majority of the work and volunteer force in the VCS, and as such the whole VCS could be viewed as a 'by women sector'. Within this representation, WGOs who predominantly benefit women and girls were included, organisations that were supporting 'people' affected by gender-based

violence were also included as it was assumed that the majority of beneficiaries were women and girls. Where there were organisations that operate in an area which predominantly affects women but the service was exclusively for men these were excluded.

Sixth, chapter three identified that a history of women's organisations included organisations which were originally by women for the benefit of others such as anti-slavery campaigns, anti-poverty work and the temperance movement. Early charitable organisations by women for women developed often as a result of recognising links between establishing freedoms for others and increased awareness of the lack of freedom for women, for example, the suffrage movement. During second wave feminism from the 1960s onwards, key issues of importance to women moved centre-stage such as access to contraception and sexual health care and ending violence against women and girls. The field of organisations therefore, changes over time in response to much wider cultural, social, economic and political shifts. A continual cycle of new organisations joining the sector and others ceasing to exist adds to the flux within the sector. The organisations, partly because of their historical development but also because of the culture and values of the organisation, may be more or less feminist in purpose, more or less conservative or progressive or explicitly non-political. Whether or not an organisation is a WGO and whether or not all WGOs are or should be feminist is a site of contention. Dominelli suggests that:

“Community initiatives undertaken by the Women's Institute are illustrative of community work undertaken by women. These endeavours contribute to community well-being but lack feminist perspective and commitment to transformative change individually and collectively.” (Dominelli 2019, p48).

Andrews (2015) however describes Women's Institutes as ‘the acceptable face of feminism’ and details ways in which Women's Institutes have contributed to a feminist agenda. In creating this representation, the degree to which a WGO was feminist was not used to decide if an organisation was a WGO or not but it is important to note these dynamics *within* the ‘boundaries’ of the sector.

Seventh, an individual organisation is also not static, it may move over time towards or away from being ‘by women and for women’. This may be in response



to the external environment or pressures but may also be a consequence of the internal organisational dynamics such as a leadership change. An examination of organisations during the period 2008 to 2018, has highlighted a number of interesting and significant shifts in the language used by WGOs. For example, terms such as spinsters, maids or widows were frequently used in charities registered in much earlier periods, but do not feature in more recent charity records. It has been beyond the scope of this study to explore correspondences between time periods and the specific language used in charity objects and activities, but this could provide further insight into how organisations represent themselves, and the messages or ideas that they promote across time.

Finally, the process of identification also takes place inside the landscape of WGOs. Each WGO was assigned to one main category, based on the activities outlined in the Charity Commission record such as an organisation providing social activities or supporting women and girls with health and well-being. However, the categories can only be seen as indicative. There are two key assumptions here – the development of the categories and the use of one category. The categories were developed in an iterative way using themes that emerged from the descriptions of the charities in their Charity record. There were many versions of the categories as a balance was sought between sufficient detail to make categories coherent and not so many categories to make comparisons between them too complex and unwieldy. While every effort was made to try and build the categories from the data and the descriptions by WGOs, this was a process which reflected the wider issues of identification and classification such as the subjective nature of categorisation. The second key and related point concerns the use of just one main category for each WGO. This is also problematic because the nature of many WGOs means that they may work in more than one category area, they may wish to describe their activities in a different way and/or may not agree with the exclusions and boundaries of these categories. The use of one category however was necessary to avoid double counting organisations. The quantitative analysis process ultimately forced decisions on what was included or excluded.

Some of the categories contain an additional layer of sub-category (see table nine below). As will be discussed below, halting the analysis at the broad level

masked important findings that exist at this more detailed and nuanced level. These sub-categories were essential to be able to provide the detailed and intersectional analysis. To make the representation as transparent as possible, the types of organisations and the key inclusions and exclusions for each category are included in table five below. Including the detail of this process is important for transparency, it also enables others to understand, use or develop these further to build their own representation.

**Table five: types of WGO**

<b>Organisation Types</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Exclusions</b>
<b>Ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG)</b>	Organisations seeking to end VAWG, and/or support women affected by VAWG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Women only EVAWG</li> <li>-EVAWG Plus (organisations that also support people who are not women)</li> <li>-Refuges</li> <li>-Organisations that support women affected by trafficking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Housing organisations that are not refuges</li> <li>-Anti-trafficking organisations that are not women specific</li> <li>-International EVAWG organisations</li> </ul>
<b>Organisations for Black and minoritised women and girls</b>	All organisations that are for Black and minoritised women and girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Health</li> <li>-General welfare</li> <li>-Social</li> <li>-EVAWG</li> <li>-Education and employment</li> <li>-Gender equality</li> <li>-Disability</li> <li>- Other</li> </ul>	Organisations which are not predominantly for Black and minoritised women and girls
<b>Health</b>	Organisations supporting women with health issues (prevention, fundraising or treatment/support).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Breast or ovarian cancer organisations</li> <li>-Family planning organisations</li> <li>-Women's health centres or projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Organisations supporting all people affected by cancer.</li> <li>-Organisations working outside the UK only.</li> </ul>
<b>Social</b>	Organisations that mainly provide social activities for women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Women's institutes</li> <li>-Girlguiding</li> <li>-Townswomen's Guild</li> <li>-Inner wheel</li> <li>-Other social groups</li> </ul>	Organisations providing a range of services not just primarily social activities.
<b>Education and Employment</b>	Organisations providing education opportunities for women and girls or supporting women and girls with employment or training	None	Schools

<b>Sports and Arts</b>	Organisations that provide sporting or arts opportunities for women and girls.	-Sport -Art	Primarily social organisations which include some arts or sports within their activities.
<b>Funding and resources</b>	-Organisations that provide funding to WGOs or funding to individual women. -WGOs that only own buildings	-Funding organisation -Buildings	Organisations that have a building, but it is not their sole/primary purpose.
<b>Gender equality</b>	Organisations that raise awareness and campaign for gender equality	None	Organisations that campaign for gender equality but it is not their sole or primary purpose.
<b>Housing</b>	Organisations that provide housing for women	None	Refuges and emergency accommodation relating to EVAWG
<b>Giving to others</b>	Organisations that are run by women but benefit a range of beneficiaries	None	Inner wheel organisations
<b>Women and girls facing additional disadvantages<sup>9</sup></b>	Organisations supporting women and girls with particular disadvantages	-Gender identity and sexuality -Women and girls with a disability - Women and girls affected by the criminal justice system - Women and girls who are sex workers - Lone parents	-Organisations that offer wider support to all LGBTQI individuals. -Provision for anyone affected by the criminal justice system. -Organisations supporting only male sex workers.
<b>Faith or moral welfare</b>	Organisations which are based on the promotion of or education about a religion or describe themselves as 'moral welfare' organisations for women.	None	Faith organisations that only operate internationally.
<b>General welfare</b>	Organisations providing a range of support to women and girls. This can typically include health and well-being, advice and support and social activities.	None	Organisations providing primarily one main activity.
<b>Other</b>	Organisations which do not fit into any of the categories above.	None	None

<sup>9</sup> Due to the small number of organisations in these categories, they have been grouped together for comparative analysis.

There were also differences between organisations of a similar type such as those offering support to people affected by domestic abuse or a wider grouping of ending violence against women and girls organisations. Again, despite common ground there was variation in the extent to which organisations provided support exclusively to women or not. For example, it would be misleading and too simplistic to categorise all domestic abuse organisations as a type of women's organisation. There are those that explicitly stated that they support *women* affected by domestic abuse in recognition of the gendered nature of the issue of domestic violence (as women are still far more likely to be affected by violence in the home (Office for National Statistics November 2022)) and those that use more neutral terms such as 'anyone'. A shift in language to 'anyone' rather than 'women' may contribute to concealing the gendered nature of the issue. Conversely, a focus on the term 'women' may mean that those who identify as non-binary or male victims of domestic abuse may struggle to access support.

## **6.2 Section summary**

On a practical level the identification of women's organisations from the Charity Commission data was problematic with limited information about organisations and a reliance for classification on the three key fields of information (name, objects and activities). It was also problematic from a theoretical point of view, how organisations are defined and classified is subjective and has an effect on what is included or excluded and what therefore is finally represented. This has the potential to have a material impact on organisations where such information is relied upon for access to recognition and resources. Classification also entails placing an organisation in a particular fixed category, but this does not address the fluidity of organisations who may change position or direction. Classification can only be seen as a static snapshot of a particular time.

The classification process forces binary decisions about what is or is not a WGO. In this part of the study, borderline cases were discussed with the supervisory team, but the researcher has predominantly made those decisions, which needs to be recognised as a use of power. This issue was also discussed in section 5.6.5 on ethical considerations above. Chapter seven explores how government policy presents WGOs and chapter eight explores how WGOs are represented and represent themselves. It is important to recognise that each of these three

representations including the quantitative representation can be seen as different expressions of discourse and each a powerful tool to represent WGOs.

The discussion above has highlighted that there are a variety of significant tensions that exist and decisions which affect what is represented as a landscape of WGOs. The next sections of the chapter detail the representation that was produced and reflects on the findings.

### **6.3 How are WGOs represented in quantitative regulatory data?**

This section answers the question, ‘how are WGOs represented in quantitative regulatory data?’. The following section (6.4) addresses how does this change between 2008 and 2018? The creation and analysis of a representation is informed by the WPR approach (Bacchi 2009, Bacchi and Goodwin 2016). Problems are constructed from the data, and the assumptions that underpin the problems and their effects are discussed.

This section of the chapter addresses how they are represented in quantitative regulatory data using a broad approach and raising three key ‘problems’ which are discussed below:

- i) WGOs are a small part of the VCS and are smaller organisations.
- ii) The majority of organisations are social organisations and almost half of WGO aggregate income is in the ten largest organisations which are predominantly health and international WGOs.
- i) WGOs are concentrated in more affluent areas.

Section 6.4 that follows focuses on changes between 2008 and 2018 using a more detailed and intersectional approach.

#### **6.3.1 Problem representations**

##### **i) Problem one: a small part of the VCS and smaller organisations**

According to the representation produced in this study, 12,474 different WGOs were identified that were on the register for England and Wales, at some point between 2008 to 2018. In 2018 there were 5,631 WGOs in total registered as charities. NCVO stated that there were 163,150 voluntary organisations in the UK in 2017/2018 (NCVO 2021d), this would suggest that WGOs who are registered

charities therefore accounted for 3.45 per cent of VCS organisations at this time (noting that WGOs in this study relate only to England and Wales). This would suggest that WGOs are a small part of the overall sector. Given that there are many sub-types with the broader VCS they may also be a significant part, but it is unclear what the other 'parts' of the VCS each account for. For example, a comparison with a sector of organisations for young people or organisations supporting people with housing or providing advice would provide a useful comparative context.

The UK Civil Society Almanac stated that across 'general charities', micro and small organisations made up 81 per cent of the sector in 2017/2018 (NCVO 2019). In 2018, 86.7 per cent of WGOs were micro and small organisations and 97.7 per cent of WGOs registered as charities had an income of under £1m in 2018. This would indicate that there are more smaller organisations which are WGOs compared with the wider VCS.

As stated above, in 2018 WGOs in this representation totalled 3.45 per cent of all VCS organisations. In 2018/19 the Civil Society Almanac totalled the VCS sector income at £56bn, this analysis suggests that the total income in 2018 for WGOs was £1.05bn which is just 1.88 per cent of total income for the whole VCS sector. This indicates that WGOs receive a much smaller proportion of income in the sector than the percentage of organisations would suggest.

There are a number of underlying assumptions here. The first is that the size of a WGO sector is important. Being a larger part of the sector could give the sector more prominence, importance and recognition. Certainly, the effects of a small sector mean that access to services and activities provided by WGOs would be limited with a small number of organisations. It also raises important questions about why WGOs are smaller in size than other VCS organisations generally. It may be due to the fact that there are many very local social organisations who do not require significant resources to function, for other WGOs types it may also be related to a lack of resources or investment to grow. There is also an underlying assumption that suggests that there may be some 'ideal' size that a WGO sector could be, raising questions about how the criteria for the ideal size could be made, by whom and at what time? This can be extended further to reflect

on why WGOs exist and are needed, and whether it is possible to reach a point where there may not be a need for those organisations addressing gender based violence, if issues of gender inequality can be resolved.

The overall effects of this problem representation are that WGOs can be identified as potentially under-funded organisation. They are organisations which are in receipt of less income for their work, than wider VCS organisations and in the case of many WGOs this would place an additional strain on the delivery of services and meeting the needs of the women and girls they support. This would be particularly pertinent during this time due to the increased demands created by austerity measures and wider awareness of the issue of violence against women and girls.

**ii) Problem two: The majority of organisations are social organisations and almost half of WGO aggregate income is in the ten largest organisations which are predominantly health and international WGOs**

WGOs registered with the Charity Commission were varied in nature with activities spanning health, ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG), social, sport, art, education, employment, and historical funding organisations. In many ways they reflect the diversity of the wider sector. Overall, fourteen main categories of organisation were developed from analysing the data. Some of the types also contain further sub-categories of organisation, many of which are explored in the detailed analysis that follows in part two below.

The top three most common types of WGO were social, EVAWG and health organisations. Social organisations accounted for 54.86 per cent of all WGOs in 2018, specifically micro (46.63 per cent) and small (6.6 per cent) size social organisations. EVAWG organisations were 8.13 per cent, and predominantly medium size organisations, whereas health accounted for 6.38 per cent of WGOs registered as charities in 2018 and contained the greatest number of major organisations for any WGO type. These findings are shown in table six below.



**Table six: WGO type by organisation income size in 2018**

	<b>Micro (Less than £10k)</b>	<b>Small (£10k to £100k)</b>	<b>Medium (£100k to £1m)</b>	<b>Large (£1m to £10m)</b>	<b>Major (£10m to £100m)</b>	<b>Super- major (More than £100m)</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Social</b>	2,626	374	83	5	1	0	3089
<b>Funding and resources</b>	260	48	8	3	0	0	319
<b>Health</b>	151	120	69	15	4	0	359
<b>Education</b>	148	71	37	2	0	0	258
<b>Black and minoritised women and girls</b>	134	69	51	5	0	0	259
<b>EVAWG</b>	129	72	207	49	1	0	458
<b>International</b>	109	76	23	5	2	1	216
<b>Housing</b>	61	103	33	4	0	0	201
<b>Faith or moral welfare</b>	51	66	32	14	0	0	163
<b>General welfare</b>	35	30	33	5	0	0	103
<b>Sport and art</b>	35	34	5	2	0	0	76
<b>Women facing additional disadvantages</b>	18	16	24	5	0	0	63
<b>Giving to others</b>	16	5	4	0	0	0	25
<b>Gender equality</b>	15	11	13	3	0	0	42
<b>Total</b>	3788	1095	622	117	8	1	5631

The majority of organisations were very small social organisations. This study would support the view therefore that those definitions of a VCS that focused on the economic dimension of the VCS (Salamon and Anheier 2015) overlook the scale of WGOs involved in social activity provision. EVAWG organisations are also a significant part of a WGO sector and tend to be medium size organisations due to the provision of services on a more frequent basis and the need for staffing, premises and specialist services compared to social organisations, who may operate on a less frequent basis and require fewer resources.

WGOs which tend to occupy the larger size categories are health and international charities, usually with a much wider spatial coverage or remit of service provision. There were only eight major organisations and one super-

major organisation in 2018 but these organisations accounted for a significant percentage of the income for the whole WGO sector. The table below shows the ten highest income WGOs and the amount of their income in 2018.

**Table seven: ten highest income WGOs in 2018**

<b>Name of organisation</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Amount of income 2018 (£m)</b>	<b>NCVO income category</b>
Marie Stopes International	International	£296.85m	Super-Major
Camfed International	International	£31.95m	Major
British Pregnancy Advisory Service	Health	£31.25m	Major
Breast Cancer Now	Health	£30.50m	Major
Girl Effect	International	£30.38m	Major
The Guide Association	Social	£24.98m	Major
Breast Cancer Care	Health	£16.19m	Major
The National Childbirth Trust	Health	£15.55m	Major
Refuge	EVAWG	£14.44m	Major
Solace Women's Aid	EVAWG	£8.61m	Large
<b>Total</b>		<b>£500.7m</b>	

The assumption underlying this representation is that income concentrated in a 'top ten' of WGOs may not be desirable. The total income for WGOs in 2018 was £1.05bn. Of this figure, almost half (47.87 per cent) was located within these top ten organisations. For comparison, The UK Civil Society Almanac stated that the Major and Super-major organisations accounted for 55 per cent of VCS sector income in 2018/19 (NCVO 2021), for WGOs the major and super-major organisations account for slightly less percentage of the aggregate income for all WGOs at 46.87 per cent. While these top ten WGOs are large, for the wider VCS, the Civil Society Almanac states that 0.49 per cent were major and super-major orgs in 2018 (NCVO 2021), yet the major and super-major WGOs were a much lower percentage of all WGOs at just 0.16 per cent. There are therefore

fewer major and super-major organisations as a percentage of WGOs than in the wider VCS, but their share of the income is more similar to that of the wider VCS.

This problem also raises questions about whether there is an 'ideal' mix of organisations by income size? What is the 'right balance' of organisation types by size, how could this be determined and who would do this? It can also create tensions between different areas of the WGO sector, creating a perception that some parts of the sector may be better or disproportionately funded than another. It may be the case that it is not necessarily about reducing the income of one WGO in favour of another, it may be that more income for all kinds of WGO is needed rather than a re-distribution within WGOs. It is known for example, that there are insufficient levels of provision for EVAWG services such as support for those affected by domestic abuse, refuges and sexual violence services (Domestic Abuse Commissioner 2022, Office for National Statistics September 2022).

Important types of WGO may be more or less affected by social, political and economic changes than others and this difference is masked by a broad level of analysis. The variety of organisations means that women and girls have a range of services and activities that they are able to access, however this 'problem' tells us little about the geographical spread of organisations, how well this matches the need for services and activities or whether provision is increasing or decreasing.

**ii) Problem three: WGOs are concentrated in more affluent areas**

In the wider VCS 19 per cent of all voluntary organisations are based in London (NCVO Almanac 2019). For WGOs there is a concentration in the South East where 21.03 per cent are located and London accounts for just 11.39 per cent. Wales and the North East have the fewest organisations.

**Table eight: number and percentage of all WGOs by English region and Wales.**

<b>Region and Wales</b>	<b>Number of WGOs</b>	<b>Percentage of all WGOs</b>
South East	934	21.03
East	585	13.17
South West	527	11.87
North West	525	11.82
London	506	11.39
East Midlands	380	8.56
West Midlands	352	7.93
Yorkshire and Humber	252	5.67
Wales	215	4.84
North East	165	3.72
Total	4441	100

The number of WGOS in locations may however vary significantly by type. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner identified a concentration of organisations supporting women with domestic abuse in London (Domestic Abuse Commissioner 2022). There may for example be a prevalence of social organisations in the South East but few organisations providing support with issues around domestic abuse, which is not shown in this broad level analysis.

Figure four below shows the concentration of WGOs per 100k population. It demonstrates that in 2018, the South West, East and South East had the highest number of WGOs per population, with Yorkshire and the Humber, London and the East Midlands with the least. There are significant differences between the lowest - Yorkshire and the Humber, which had just 4.6 WGOs per 100k and the highest - South East with 10.23. This corresponds to literature highlighting gaps in service provision and difficulty in accessing services (Domestic Abuse Commissioner 2022) but again tells us little about which types of WGO are operating in those areas.

**Figure four: regional distribution of WGOs per 100k population in 2018**

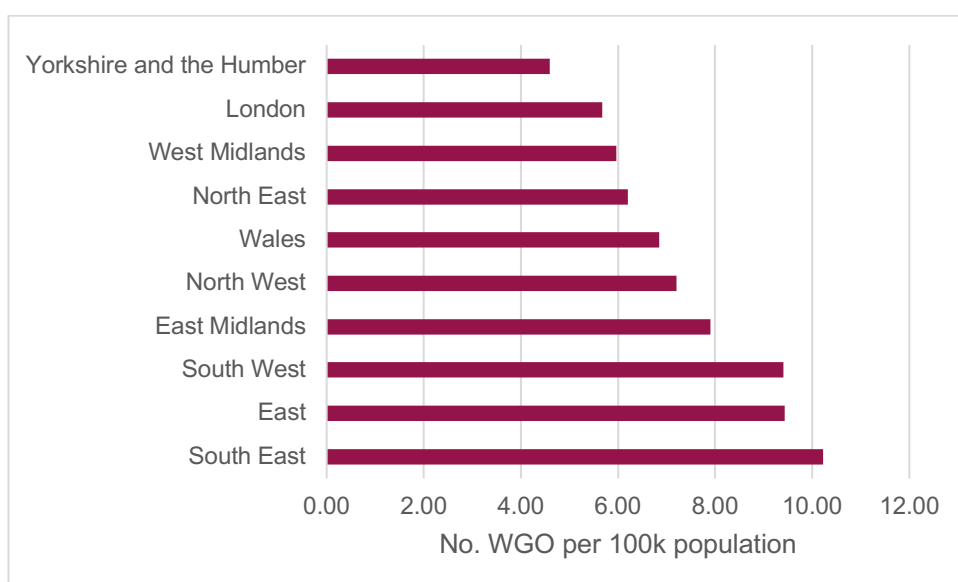
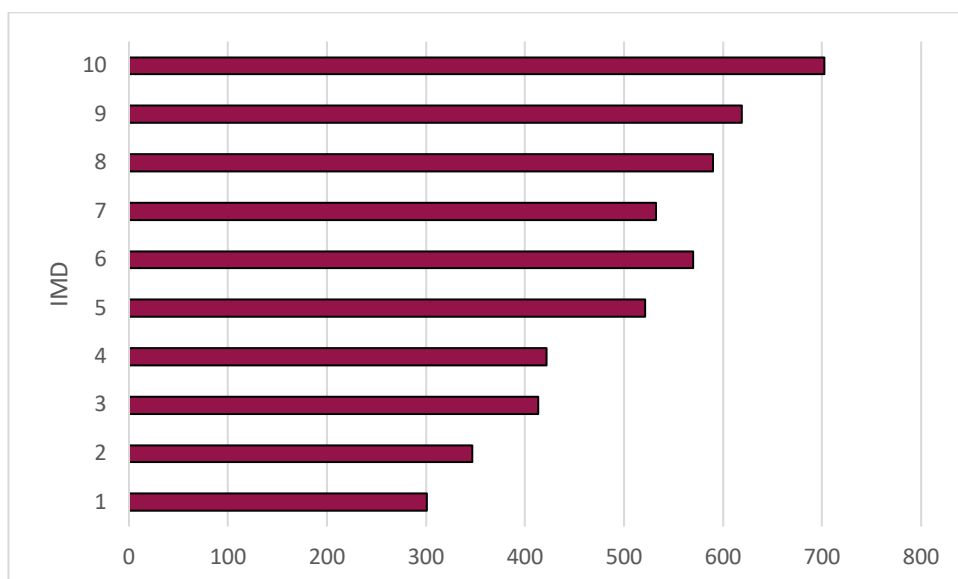


Figure five below shows a general trend of more organisations in the least deprived areas and fewer organisations in the more deprived areas (10= least deprived and 1= most deprived).

**Figure five: number of WGOs in 2018 by Index of Multiple deprivation (IMD)**



The assumption underlying this problem is that there should be access to WGOs for any women and girls that need or could benefit from their services or activities. An unequal access to particular services means that there are women and girls

who may not be able to be supported with critical issues such as gender-based violence which will have very real consequences for their health and well-being. This is particularly the case for women and girls located within areas of greater levels of deprivation who may not have access to resources to travel or to fund a means of exit or those in rural areas who may need to make significant journey to access support. Similarly, the benefits of health and well-being, social or access to campaign groups will also be more difficult for some women and girls.

### **6.3.2 Section summary**

While a number of important ‘problems’ emerge from this broad level analysis, there are also a number of ‘silences’. In line with the feminist approach to exploring data (D’ignazio and Klein 2020), it is known that this is particularly important when considering changes for organisations supporting women and girls facing additional disadvantages where differences may not be visible at a broad level.

This broad view also doesn’t account for a changing picture of WGO experiences. The post-structural approach requires greater attention on difference and change, recognising the shifting WGO experience both across and within the landscape. The next section presents and discusses the second part of this chapter. It explores the data in relation to specific sub-categories in more detail and across time, to provide an analysis at a greater level of detail.

### **6.4 How does this change between 2008 and 2018?**

This section turns to the research question of ‘how does this change between 2008 and 2018?’ This raises a further five ‘problems’ and a corresponding discussion of the findings, again using the WPR framework.

- i) A falling number of organisations and a greater decline than the wider VCS.
- ii) Increased aggregate income but decreased percentage of VCS income.
- iii) Not all WGOs have experienced positive change between 2008 and 2018.

- iv) Organisations for Black and Minoritised Women and Girls (OBMWG) have had a decline in income and number and have received lower comparative levels of income than general WGOs.
- v) Some areas have experienced a greater decrease in WGOs than others.

#### 6.4.1 Problem representations

##### i) **Falling number of organisations and greater decline than the wider VCS**

In 2008, there were 10,283 registered organisations, by 2018 this had fallen to 5,631 organisations, a drop in the number of WGOs who are registered as charities, by 45.24 per cent.

**Figure six: number of WGOs registered as charities 2008 to 2018.**

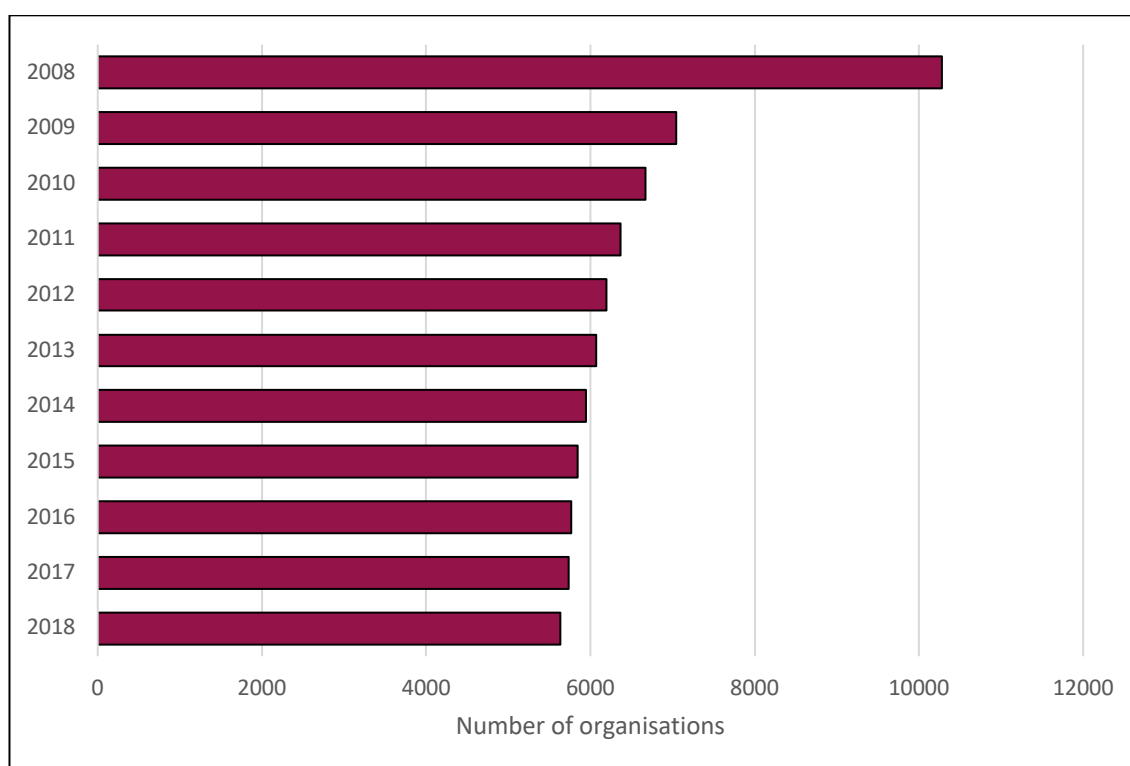


Figure six shows that the most significant decline was between 2008 and 2009. The decline between 2008 and 2009 was largely due to a fall in the number of social organisations from 7,592 to 3,089. From 2009 onwards there had been a steady decline in the number of organisations each year. It is not possible to know from the data available how many specifically ceased to operate in 2008 and it

may be that this is misleading. There may have been legacy organisations that had ceased to exist in a previous year but had not been removed at the exact point of closure and were later removed in 2008 as part of a regular administrative cleaning process (Morgan 2011). Similarly, although there are a specified number of organisations on the register, this does not necessarily correlate to ‘active’ organisations. This may be due to administrative processes as outlined above or because organisations are inactive but have not themselves de-registered. It may also be possible that organisations are continuing to exist but have ceased to be registered charities and now operate outside of the charity register due to a change in income level, circumstances requiring registration or a shift to another organisation model. As an example, in 2008 of the 10,283 organisations registered, only 8,395 submitted accounts in that year (81.64 per cent). In 2018, 5,631 WGOs were registered and of these 5,125 (91.01 per cent) submitted accounts, suggesting that in 2008 there were more inactive organisations on the register. The number of registered organisations is not therefore an exact representation of the number of ‘active’ charities and can only be indicative.

For the general trend of decline, as a comparison following the economic recession in 2008, for the voluntary sector<sup>10</sup> as a whole:

“Numbers fell by 4 per cent between 2007/08 and 2009/10. The number of organisations remained at those levels but rose again in 2013/14 and have been almost stable since.” (NCVO 2019).

For WGOs the percentage drop between 2008 and 2009 was 45.94 per cent and between 2009 and 2010 was 5.67 per cent. This fell again between 2010 and 2011 by 4.68 per cent, steadily decreasing each year thereafter at a smaller rate. This would suggest that, with the year 2008-09 aside for the reasons stated above, overall WGOs have still suffered a greater decline in numbers than the general sector, at a time when the general VCS has been more stable.

The assumption underlying this problem is that a decline in the number of WGOs is important because it demonstrates a shrinking access to critical services,

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<sup>10</sup> NCVO use the term ‘general charities’ and also exclude independent schools from their analysis <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/uk-civil-society-almanac-2021/about/definitions/##/>

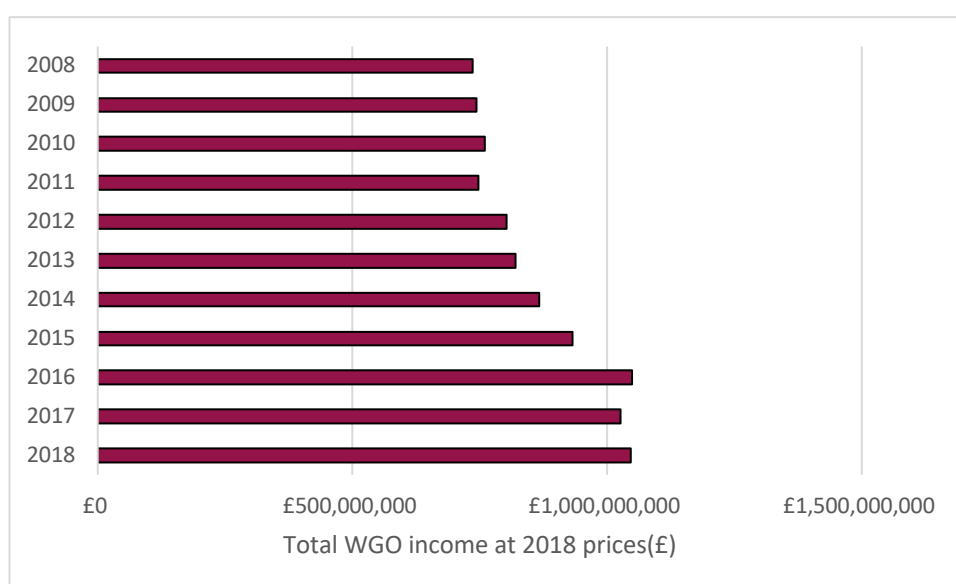


spaces for women only socialising, health and education and employment activities. This is at a time when, as the literature review has shown, that need was increasing and particularly for women and girls facing the greatest disadvantages. It is also significant that WGOs appear to have faced a greater level of decline than the wider sector, although further research is needed to explore this further. While it is shown in this ‘problem’ that the number of WGOs is declining, it is also important to locate where these losses are specifically found and whether this is across all types of WGO or limited to social organisations. This is explored in problem three (iii) below.

## ii) Increased aggregate income but decrease in percentage of sector income

Part one of the analysis identified a figure for the total income of WGOs in 2018. It was also noted that that the income for WGOs was less than their percentage of the sector in number of organisations. Comparing each year between 2008 and 2018, it is possible to add further detail to that problem, to demonstrate that WGO income has largely increased over the period as a general trend. In 2008, the total income for all WGOs was approximately £736m (at 2018 prices). In 2018 this had risen to £1.05bn. A rise of £309.7m or 29.60 per cent. Figure seven below shows WGO income each year between 2008 and 2018.

**Figure seven: WGO total income 2008 to 2018**

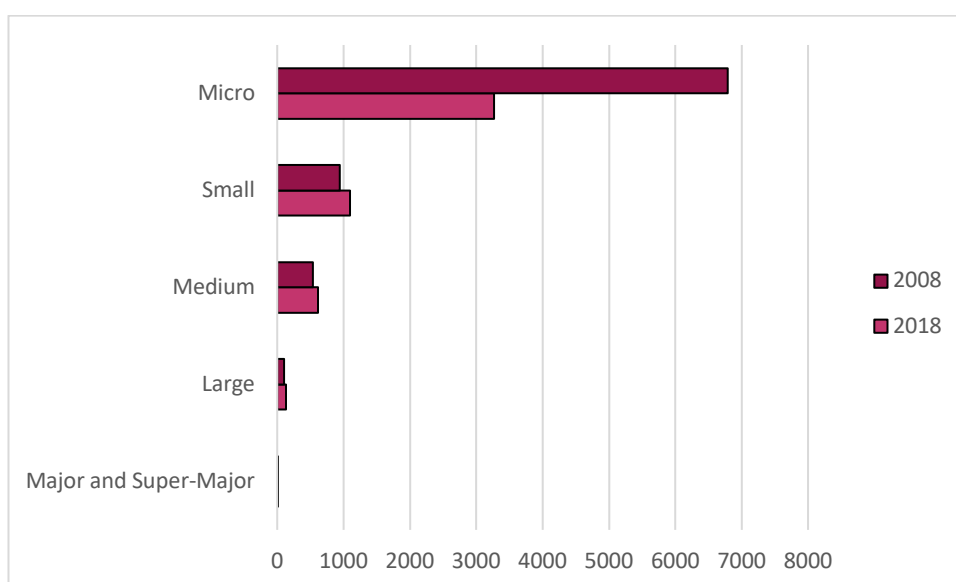


The UK Civil Society Almanac estimated that in 2008/09 the UK voluntary and community sector comprised 171,074 organisations (Clark et al. 2010) and the total income was £35.5 billion (Kane and Allen 2011, p9). This would suggest that in 2008 WGOs would have represented 6.01 per cent of organisations and 2.07 per cent of all sector income. As noted above WGOs represented a much smaller percentage (3.45 per cent) of all VCS organisations in 2018 and just 1.88 per cent of financial resources. This indicates that WGOs have decreased as a percentage of the sector (noting the caveats above regarding the drop in organisations between 2008 and 2009). WGOs also have a decreased percentage of all VCS income. Although the percentage point gap between the number of organisations and the amount of funding has decreased.

The increase in income level and the decrease in gap between percentage of the sector and percentage of income may suggest that WGOs were in a better position by the end of 2018 than in 2008, but this masks a number of important points.

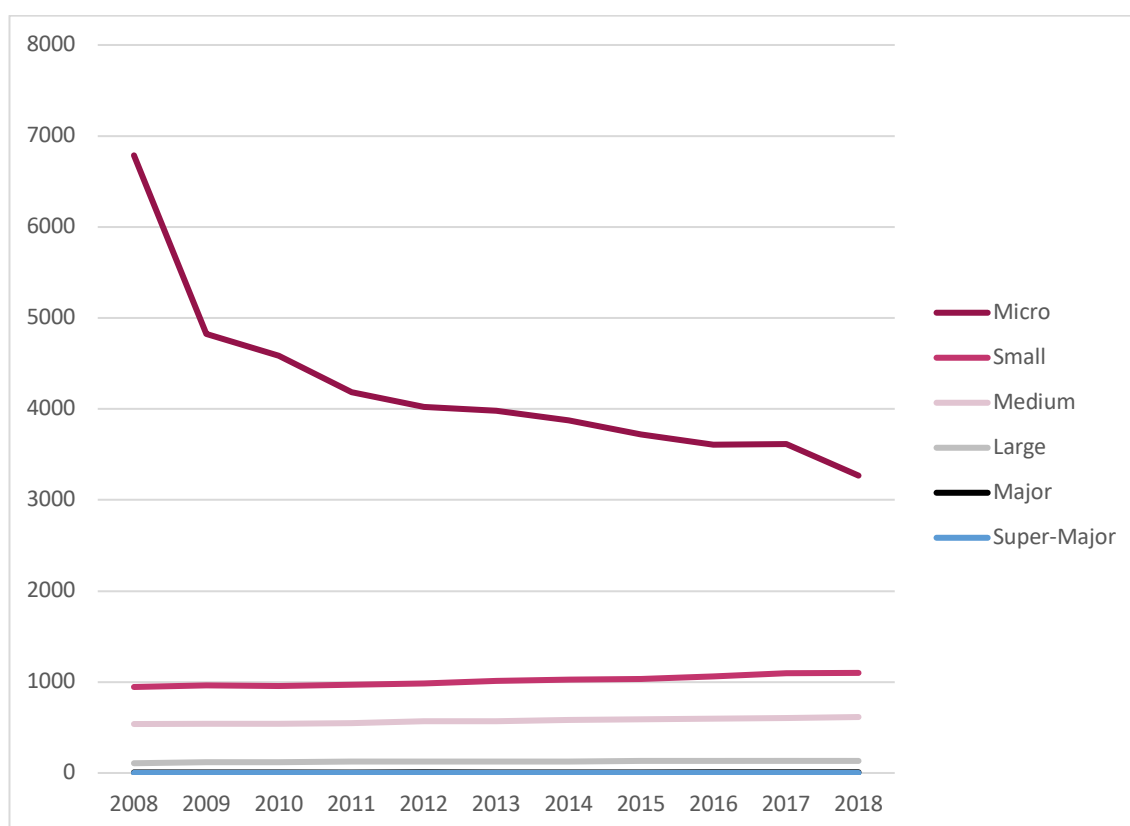
A decline in the number of organisations and an increase in income suggests a period of consolidation, where resources are concentrated in fewer, larger organisations. Income in 2008 for the largest organisation, Marie Stopes, was approximately £100m at 2018 prices, and by 2018 this had risen to approximately £297m. This one super-major organisation alone has therefore had a substantial impact on the aggregate income for the whole sector. Also significant here is the contribution of 'Girl Effect', another international charity with an income of over £30m in 2018. This organisation did not exist in 2008 and represents a significant boost in the total income to the sector. When combined these two organisations account for £227m of the £310m increase in aggregate income for WGOs between 2008 and 2018, leaving an increase of approximately £83m across the rest of the sector. It is not known from this problem how the increased aggregate level of income has been distributed across all WGO types, but this is explored further in problems three (iii) and four (iv) below.

**Figure eight: number of WGOs by size in 2008 and 2018**



The scale of organisations has shifted between 2008 and 2018, where micro size organisations have decreased significantly and the other categories have all increased, as shown in figure eight. It is possible to see that after the fall in number of organisations between 2008 and 2009 outlined above, there has been a continual decline in the number of micro size organisations. The other organisation sizes have all increased but not to a significant degree, with the greatest increase for small organisations.

**Figure nine: number of WGOs each year 2008 to 2018 by size**



It is critical therefore to explore beneath the headline figures to gain a more nuanced understanding of these changes. While the total income has increased as a headline figure, it is far from evenly distributed across the sector. The findings above support existing research that point to an increase in the number of larger organisations where increased income can move organisations into a different size category (for example from micro to small, small to medium) (NCVO 2019). It also differs from research observing that changes have been more pronounced for small and medium size organisations (Clifford 2017). For WGOs the greatest changes have been for the micro size organisations. This may be a reflection of the overall tendency for WGOs to be smaller but may also be because of the nature of the work done by medium size WGOs. For example, many EAWG organisations are medium size and these have had a level of investment from government during this time (which is shown in chapter seven), with some important exceptions which are explored in problem three (iii) below.

While addressing the issue of a lack of knowledge about where the increased income had been distributed as highlighted in the part one broad level analysis

above, the effect of this problem representation may be to create a focus on the top organisations as taking ‘too large a share’ of income. It may be that the issue is not an increase in income to these specific organisations as a share of WGOs but that increases are needed into the WGO landscape and across all WGOs. It is therefore useful to explore the different experiences of types of WGO.

**iii) Not all WGOs have experienced positive change between 2008 and 2018**

Problem three proposes that there was significant variety in the experiences of WGO by type between 2008 and 2018. It has not been possible to explore all of the types of WGO in detail due to the limitations of the scope of this study, however as outlined in Chapter five, a number of specific categories were selected for detailed analysis. The types that were explored in more detail are Ending Violence Against Women and Girls organisations (EVAWG), organisations for women facing additional disadvantage, Organisations for Black and Minoritised Women and Girls (OBMWG), gender equality and general welfare organisations.

Table nine below explains how the types of organisations have been divided, where applicable, into further sub-categories for this section of the analysis. It also shows the number of sub-categories of organisations in 2008 and 2018, their aggregate income in 2008 and 2018, and the percentage changes.

**Table nine: type of organisation, sub-categories, number and percentage change of WGOs in 2008 and 2018**

Type	Sub-categories	No. 2008	No. 2018	% change	Income in 2008 (at 2018 prices)	Income in 2018	% change
<b>EVAWG</b>	Women and girls who have been trafficked	2	13	550	£0.009m	£5.27m	58306.46
	EVAWG women only	205	273	33.17	£54.97m	£108.51m	97.41
	EVAWG women plus	64	81	26.56	£7.45m	£18.23m	144.91
	Refuge	160	91	-43.13	£86.2m	£83.31m	-3.34
<b>Women facing additional disadvantages</b>	Women affected by the criminal justice system (CJS)	10	16	60	£3.38m	£6.66m	96.85
	Gender identity and sexuality organisations	12	16	33.33	£1.07m	£4.36m	306.27
	Women who are sex workers	17	22	29.41	£3.04m	£5.13m	68.8
	Women and girls with a disability	7	4	-42.86	£0.47m	£0.56m	20.27
	Lone parents	14	5	-64.29	£4.22m	£4m	-5.29
<b>Gender equality</b>	Gender equality	19	42	54.76	£3.09m	£11.89m	74.00
<b>General welfare</b>	General welfare	93	103	9.71	£12.84m	£25.31m	49.28
<b>OBMWG</b>	All <sup>11</sup>	294	259	-11.90	£27.92m	£25.98m	-6.95

Each type of WGO is discussed in relation to changes between 2008 and 2018. The changes are then considered in total in relation to the WPR approach.

<sup>11</sup> The total for all organisations in this category is shown here. An analysis of sub-categories is explored in problem six below.

The **EVAWG** category contains organisations such as those providing support to survivors of sexual abuse or domestic violence, the provision of refuges and women only anti-trafficking organisations. Organisations which are for women only have also been identified separately from those that offer wider services (women plus organisations). The review of existing literature indicated that there may be an increase in organisations that are not just for women only and this separation allowed further exploration of this point.

Table nine demonstrates that within the EVAWG organisation category, there has been a significant increase in the number of organisations supporting women and girls who have been trafficked. However, it is also important to note that while the growth rate is high, the overall number of organisations remains very low. There were just two organisations supporting women and girls who have been trafficked in 2008 and still only 12 organisations in 2018. The significant percentage increase is due to the small numbers of organisations concerned. Organisations supporting women and girls who have been trafficked have also had a period of very significant investment which peaked in 2016. The very small amount of income in 2008 which was just £9,022 means that the growth to a figure of £5.27m is unmatched by any other types of WGO. There has been increased policy attention on trafficking during this period, which undoubtedly will have impacted on the increase in number and the significant increase in income in this sub-category. It has not been within the scope of this study to explore all organisations including non-WGOs working to combat trafficking and support survivors, but a comparison of all anti-trafficking organisations to explore the overall trends would provide further insight.

For EVAWG women only, which are the largest group, there has been an increase above base level over the period in the number of organisations. Women only EVAWG organisations have increased by 33.17 per cent in total and women plus organisations have increased by 26.56 per cent. There are also more EVAWG organisations in 2018 which are women only (273) than those which are women plus (81), as shown in table nine above. This would suggest that women plus organisations are not more prevalent than women only organisations by number. EVAWG organisations for women only have had a steady and significant increase in funding. However, EVAWG women plus have had the third highest

increase in income which would suggest that although this was not the case in terms of number, in terms of income, organisations offering services to not just women are growing at a greater rate than those which are women only. This would support the view that more organisations are moving toward operating additional services beyond women only provision.

EVAWG organisations are typically organisations that support survivors of domestic or sexual violence. As noted in the literature review in chapter three sexual violence organisations have had a period of more consistent investment from central government which “had saved them from closure” (Heady et al. 2009, p5). The findings here would also support that view as they have had steady increases in income across the period. In contrast, refuges which have not had the same consistent central funding have had a decline in income shown in table nine above. Refuges have also declined in number from 160 in 2008 to 91 in 2018, a difference of 30.6 per cent. This would confirm the concerns raised about the loss of refuge provision (TUC 2015, Women’s Aid 2014). These findings may also lend support to research suggesting that larger providers are better placed to bid and prepare for commissioning contracts for service provision, since across all WGOs, as organisations that remain in 2018 are generally larger in size as discussed above.

A percentage increase for the number of **organisations for women and girls facing additional disadvantages** can also be noted, although they remain a very small percentage of the sector at 1.12 per cent in 2018. They are a small percentage of WGO total income at 1.98 per cent but as shown in table six in part one above, they are more evenly spread across the micro, small and medium income brackets than many other WGO types.

There is a mixed experience for organisations for women and girls facing additional disadvantages. Organisations supporting women and girls affected by the criminal justice system have notably grown in number and there has also been an increase in the number of general welfare organisations. This may reflect increased policy interest in women affected by the criminal justice system, particularly as some of the general welfare organisations will be women’s centres and some of these will be specifically involved in supporting women affected by



the criminal justice system. There has also been an increase in the number of organisations providing support for sex workers, although the figure is very low with only 22 organisations in 2018.

Some of the greatest declines in the number of organisations is found amongst those for lone parents, and for women and girls with disabilities. Organisations for women and girls with a disability have declined by 42.86 per cent, while organisations for lone parents have declined by 64.29 per cent although again the number of organisations is very low in both instances. It is important to note that the small numbers of organisations, coupled with the decrease in number, occur during a time when these organisations are likely to be under increased demand from women who have been disproportionately affected by austerity measures (Levitas 2012, The Fawcett Society 2012, Women's Budget Group 2019). This is also the case for the decline in the number of OBMWG which have decreased by 11.9 per cent during this period.

It is also evident that the decline in number is coupled with a decrease in income for some organisations supporting women facing additional disadvantages such as lone parents, and OBMWG. While the income for organisations supporting disabled women and girls is very inconsistent, this may be related to the very small number of organisations in this sub-category. Lone parent organisations have had a sustained period of decline although the fall in income is far less of a percentage decrease than that in the number of organisations (5.29 per cent drop in income compared to 64.29 per cent in number) again as above suggesting a consolidation of resources into a small number of much larger organisations. OBMWG have also had a similar experience with a decline of 6.95 per cent in aggregate income alongside the decline of 11.90 per cent in number of organisations. This is particularly concerning as it coincides with a time of an increased need for support services as previously outlined and is alongside an increase in income for other types of WGO. It is unclear from this study alone whether this is due to a shift from provision by specialist OBMWG to more general organisations or just a decline in resources for OBMWG. Further research with WGOs would provide important further insight in this area.

Although ‘gender identity and sexuality’, ‘women affected by the criminal justice system’, ‘support for sex workers’ organisations and organisations for women and girls with a disability all experienced sizeable percentage increases in income, the gains in total income are actually modest due to their lower absolute amounts of income, as demonstrated in table nine above.

Gender identity and sexuality organisations as a category have grown but this has primarily been the case for gender identity rather than sexuality organisations, again this corresponds to both a wider interest in gender identity particularly in fourth wave feminism (as identified in the literature review) and also a decline in organisations focused on women’s sexuality (Mackay 2021). Similarly, the large increases in income for gender identity and sexuality may be a sign of increased interest in these topics within the wider social and political environment.

**General welfare organisations** include those organisations particularly for women and girls who offer a range of services, usually in one location, such as advice, advocacy, health information, training, support and social activities. Women’s centres are one important example of organisations within this grouping. General welfare organisations grew as a percentage of the WGO sector’s aggregate income from 1.74 per cent to 2.42 per cent. The number of organisations grew by just under 10% between 2008 and 2018. As stated above, the gains for these WGOs may be related to investment in initiatives providing support for women affected by the Criminal Justice System, as women’s centres which may have been commissioned to work in this area, are categorised within this group.

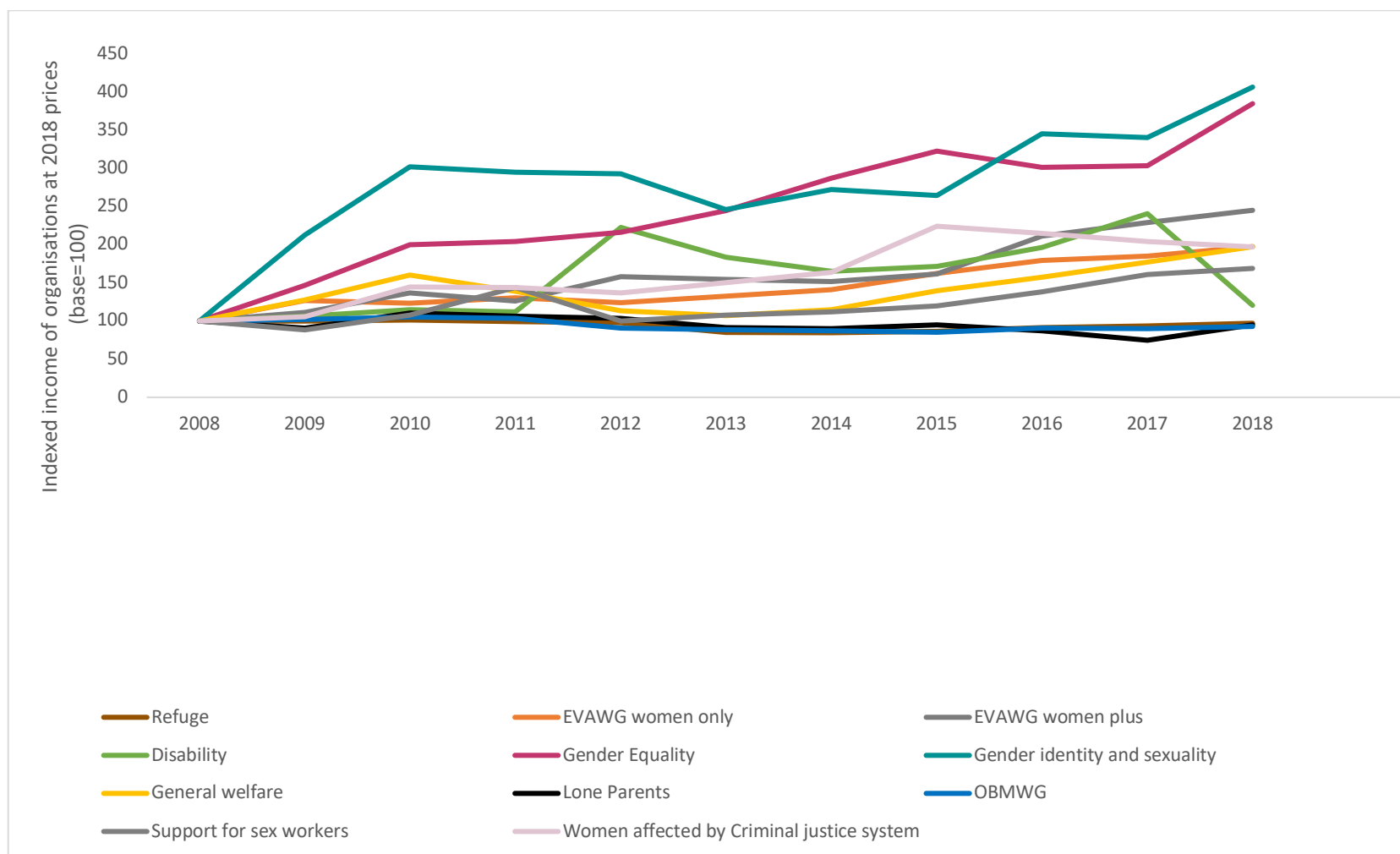
Table nine shows significant growth for **gender equality organisations**. Gender equality organisations are a small percentage of the sector, at 0.18 per cent of the number of organisations in 2008 and 0.75 per cent in 2018. The number of gender equality organisations grew by 54.76% between 2008 and 2018. In 2008, they recorded 0.42 per cent of all WGO income growing to 1.14 per cent in 2018. The income increase was considerable at 74%. They include organisations ranging from micro to medium size, with three prominent organisations in the large size category, including for example The Fawcett Society.

This may correspond to greater interest in gender equality issues and a growth in new organisations established for this cause. Similarly, the large increases in income for gender equality organisations may again be a sign of increased interest in these topics within the wider social and political environment as well as campaign work by WGOs.

This analysis by type so far has indicated that the income increases have been to EVAWG organisations working to end sexual violence (both women only and women plus), women affected by CJS and general welfare organisations, gender identity and gender equality organisations and that there have been declines in income for OBMWG, lone parents' organisations and refuges. Comparing the relative incomes across the sector gives an overview of the different experiences of WGO types.

Using indexing, the chart below demonstrates comparative changes in income levels for the sub-categories of WGOs across each year in the time period. Note that organisations providing support to women and girls who have been trafficked are not included on the chart because of the sheer scale of percentage increase in income mentioned above.

**Figure ten: indexed income changes for WGOs**



Comparatively, gender equality and gender identity and sexuality have increased their income the most, and lone parents and OBMWG the least.

There are multiple assumptions underlying this problem representation that 'not all WGOs have experienced positive change between 2008 and 2018'. One such assumption is that all WGOs should and will have similar experiences. As the study has demonstrated there is a huge diversity of WGOs in terms of size, age, income, location and purpose which all impact on the decline or growth of organisations in number and in terms of income. Some WGOs may decline due to a loss of purpose such as small historical funds for individuals, others may fit with areas of increased interest such as gender equality organisations.

It is also important to note that a type of WGOs percentage of aggregate WGO income does not suggest or reflect any ideal of what this 'should be'. It does not necessarily follow that because several organisations represent a percentage of a population that they should receive the corresponding percentage of the income. The number of organisations of each type can be related to a variety of factors including levels of need or interest in providing services or activities in this area. This would require further exploration however it is known that the need for many important WGO services is greater than can be met (Domestic Abuse Commissioner 2022). Requirements will also fluctuate according to context such as time and place as an organisation's work may attract greater income at one point but that this can also decline or fluctuate within the period such as anti-trafficking organisations for women.

The broad analysis of sector income concealed important differences between organisation types. The effect of this more detailed representation has been the ability to highlight the specific issues for refugees, organisations for women and girls with disabilities, lone parent organisations and OBMWG which would otherwise have remained less visible. There are always 'silences' however as the representation has only considered a selection of WGOs for a detailed analysis from the types identified and doesn't display differences within these categories. The problem below provides further analysis of OBMWG.

**iv) OBMWG have had a decline in income and number and have received lower comparative levels of income**

There were 444 OBMWG on the register between 2008 and 2018. In 2008 there were 294 organisations identified as OBMWG and by 2018 this had fallen to 259 organisations. OBMWG have had a decline in number of organisations by 11.9 per cent and a decline in income of 6.95 per cent reflecting concerns raised in extant literature about the particularly negative impact of austerity on these organisations (Imkaan 2008 and 2016, Emejulu and Bassel 2015, Bassel and Emejulu 2018, Vacchelli and Kathrecha 2013).

OBMWG are predominantly general welfare organisations providing a wide range of services, activities and support in one organisation. They also include EVAWG organisations as the second largest sub-category within the group in 2018, which replaced education organisations as the second largest group in 2008. EVAWG organisations for Black and minoritised women and girls provide support with issues such as sexual violence, domestic abuse, FGM and honour-based violence. There are also a significant number of organisations from health, education and employment, social, housing, and gender equality. The numbers and income levels for OBMWG in 2008 and 2018 are shown in table ten below.

**Table ten: numbers and income levels of types of OBMWG**

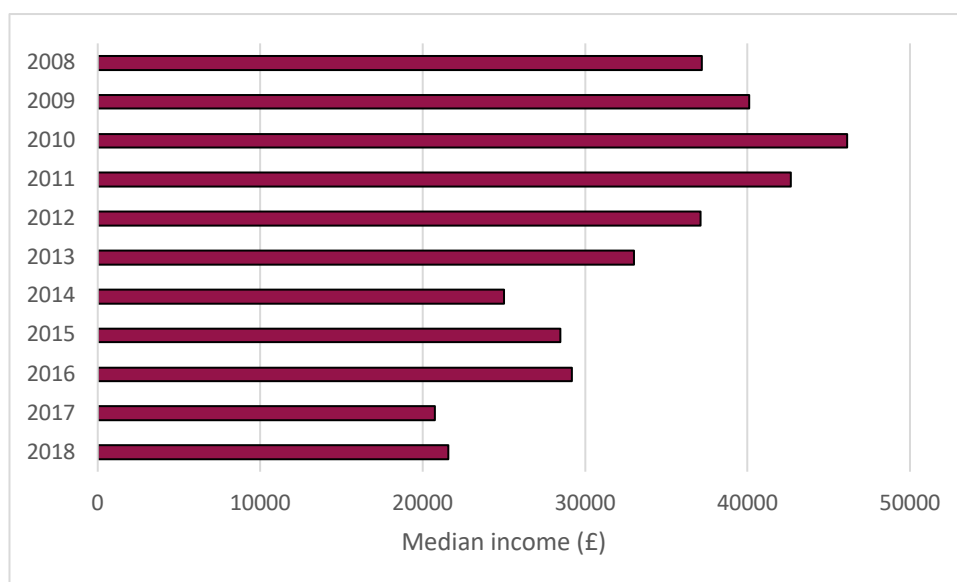
<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>No. 2008</b>	<b>No. 2018</b>	<b>% change</b>	<b>Income 2008 at 2018 prices</b>	<b>Income 2018</b>	<b>% change</b>
<b>Social</b>	8	6	-25.00	£196,453	£411,273	109.35
<b>Gender equality</b>	7	9	28.57	£1,393,096	£1,961,344	40.79
<b>Faith or moral welfare</b>	4	4	0	£17,740	£24,144	36.10
<b>Refuge</b>	9	9	0	£4,734,029	£6,181,884	30.58
<b>Housing</b>	1	1	0	£183,514	£199,677	8.81
<b>EVAWG<sup>12</sup></b>	19	23	21.05	£4,564,232	£4,770,158	4.51
<b>General welfare</b>	197	167	-15.22	£14,196,228	£11,120,182	-21.67
<b>Health</b>	15	12	-20.00	£965,237	£631,336	-34.59
<b>Education</b>	27	21	-22.22	£1,359,017	£592,079	-56.43
<b>Other</b>	4	5	25.00	£142,868	£40,932	-71.35
<b>Disability</b>	3	2	-33.33	£165,656	£43,795	-73.56

The prevalence of general welfare, education and employment, and gender equality based organisations compared to the wider WGOs is particularly notable and can be seen as a reflection of differing needs and circumstances of Black and minoritised women and girls, where organisations often act as a hub providing a range of support in one location and where support with education such as English as a second language courses, health and well-being and equality issues are common.

In line with findings above for all WGOs, the aggregate median income for OBMWG declined significantly between 2008 and 2018, suggesting smaller organisation sizes by income, as shown in figure eleven below.

<sup>12</sup> This does not include refugee provision.

**Figure eleven: median income for OBMWG in England and Wales 2008 to 2018**



There are also some important differences from the experience of general WGOs detailed above. Table ten above demonstrates a decline in the number of OBMWG which are general welfare organisations, education, health and for women and girls with a disability and a fall in income for the same WGO types apart from social OBMWG which increased. Both EVAWG (not including refugees) and gender equality increased in both number and income between 2008 and 2018.

There are greater numbers of general welfare OBMWG than WGOs in general and an important number of differences to note. The number of general welfare organisations which are not specialist has remained relatively stable between 2008 and 2018 but general welfare OBMWG experienced a decline in number. General welfare OBMWG have also consistently recorded a lower income and while funding for WGO general welfare organisations increased between 2008 and 2018 by 49.28 per cent (see table nine), there was a drop of 21.67 per cent in the aggregate income for general welfare OBMWG (see table ten above). It may be the case that many of the general WGO welfare organisations are more likely to be involved in work supporting women and girls affected by the criminal justice system and therefore benefitted from income through government investment in this area and that general welfare OBMWG may be 'more



generalist' in the majority of cases, but the differences are significant and further research is needed in this area.

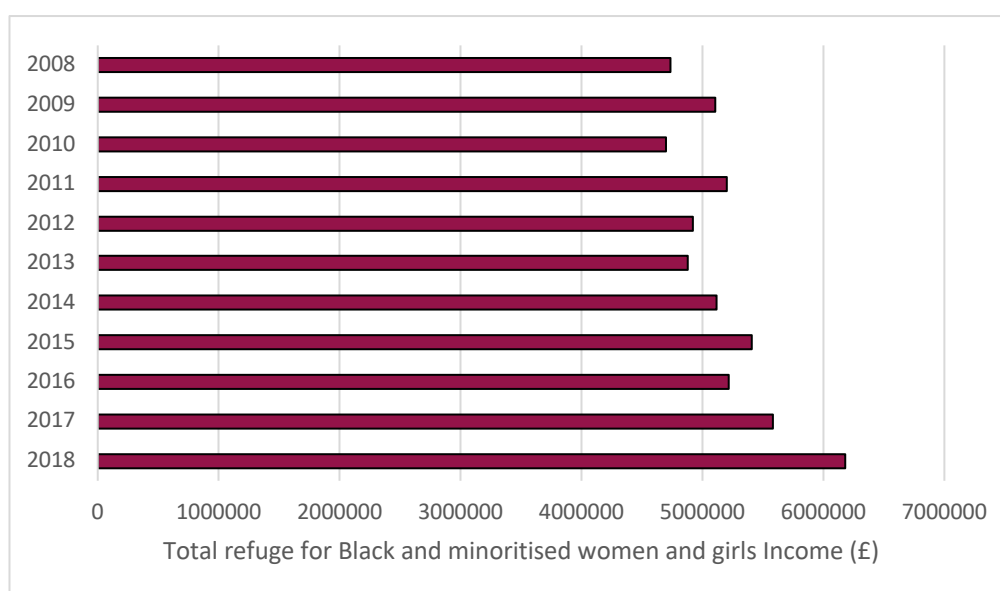
Education organisations had a significant percentage decrease in aggregate income. This is mainly due to the size of the organisations that closed during this time. Three were medium size organisations who had an income over £100,000 and two were small organisations. For organisations in the social category, the increase is due to the significant growth of one medium size organisation. Organisations supporting Black and minoritised women with disabilities also have a low income as well as being very few in number and a lower mean income level. A particularly important area with few resources.

EVAWG organisations for Black and minoritised women and girls grew in number by 21.05 per cent between 2008 and 2018<sup>13</sup> but the number of organisations remains very low (23 organisations in 2018) so the percentage increase appears more significant. The percentage increase for income was also not at the same rate and was lower at just 4.51 per cent which equates to a reduced mean income per organisation. Conversely, general EVAWG organisations increased in number by 6.26 per cent and recorded an increase in income much greater than the rate of growth in number (44.89 per cent – see table nine above). There were only 9 refuge OBMWG registered as charities in 2008 and 2018, but 13 in total that were on the register between 2008 and 2018. Two closed during the period and two of them were registered in 2016 suggesting a turnover of organisations. The chart below shows the recorded income between 2008 and 2018 for refuge provision.

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<sup>13</sup> For a figure comparable to the category for WGOs, the refuge and EVAWG group are added together.

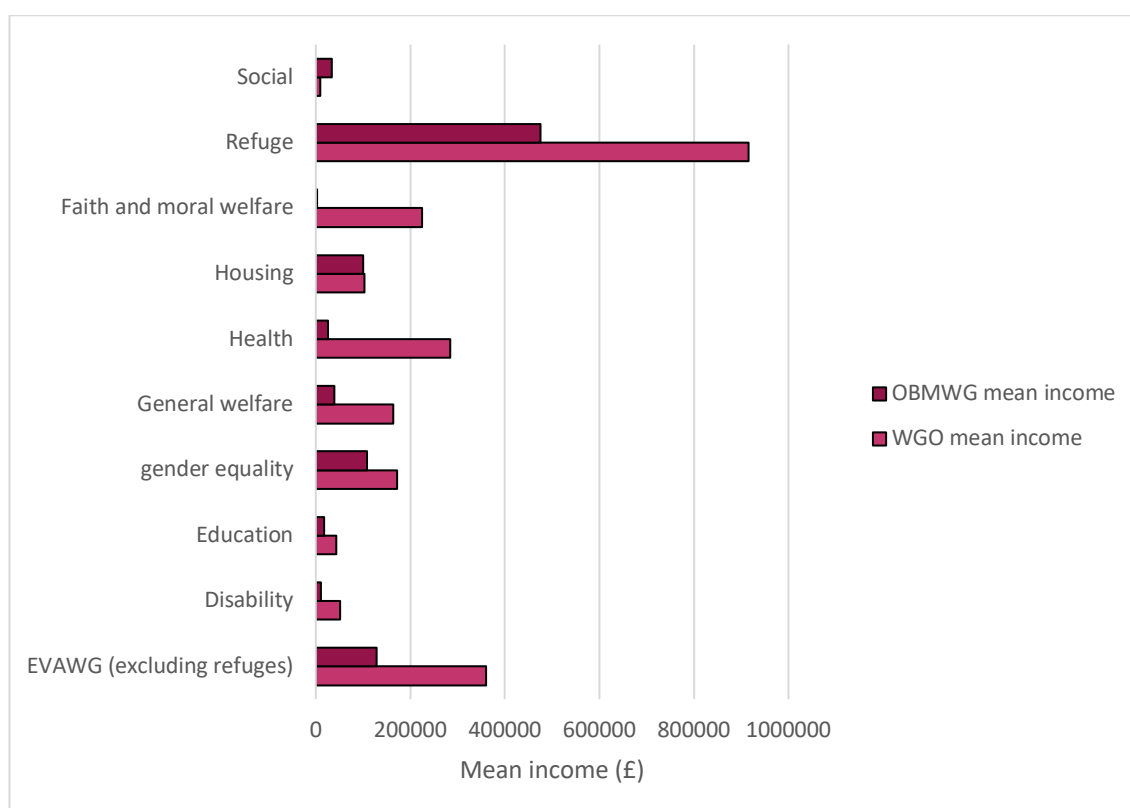
**Figure twelve: refugees for Black and minoritised women and girls income 2008 to 2018**



There is a mixed picture of income between 2008 and 2018 with low points in 2010 (where it drops to 46.96m) and in 2013 (where it falls to £48.76m). Overall, however there is an increase between 2008 and 2018 of 30.58 per cent. These changes to refugees suggest fluctuations with overall an improved situation between 2008 and 2018. This may be due to heightened awareness of the needs of these specialist organisations. The turnover of organisations is problematic, where organisations have to be re-established (perhaps in different locations) and expertise is potentially lost with negative effects for the women and girls they support.

In comparison, the number of general WGO refugees fell by a more severe 43.13 per cent and their aggregate income by 3.34 per cent. However, there are significantly more WGO refugees with much greater levels of income. It is also useful to compare the mean income of WGOs and WGOs for Black and minoritised women and girls to demonstrate differences. This is shown in figure thirteen below.

**Figure thirteen: comparison of mean income WGO and OBMWG**



The mean income for OBMWG is only greater for social organisations. In all other instances the mean income for OBMWG is lower than that for the comparative WGO. In some instances, this difference is substantial for example EVAWG, refugees, health and general welfare.

The assumptions underlying this problem representation are that OBMWG should be able to have sufficient income to support women and girls. Under the current circumstances due to the increased demand on services and the additional disadvantages faced by Black and minoritised women and girls, the assumption is that the number of organisations and the level of income should rise to meet the challenges.

Notwithstanding the funding difficulties for general WGOs, this exploration of OBMWG would support existing literature that points to specific funding difficulties for specialist OBMWG and organisations supporting women facing additional disadvantages (Imkaan 2008, 2016; Women's Resource Centre 2018; Jacobs et al. 2020) and a loss of organisations and amount of income in many

important circumstances. This representation specifically highlights that OBMWG typically have much lower income level than general WGOs. Lower levels of funding may be in part expected due to the lower population size but they may also serve much larger geographical areas due to their specialist nature and the very low number of organisations operating. The women and girls who are supported also face additional disadvantage and therefore may require more long term and specialist support necessitating greater levels of income to do this work. Such large disparities between the level of funding received by WGOs and those supporting Black and minoritised women and girls therefore requires urgent attention. Further research is needed but qualitative research indicates that there are particular difficulties for OBMWG in accessing funding which may have a role in this disparity including the impact of commissioning which favours larger more generic service provision which may be larger WGOs, general VCS organisations or private sector providers (TUC 2015; Heady et al. 2011; Vacchelli and Kathrecha 2013; Tilki et al. 2015; Sandhu and Stephenson 2015). Given that it is already known that there are important and urgent issues here, investment in these WGOs may be needed while further understanding is developed.

**v) Some areas have experienced a greater decrease in WGOs than others.**

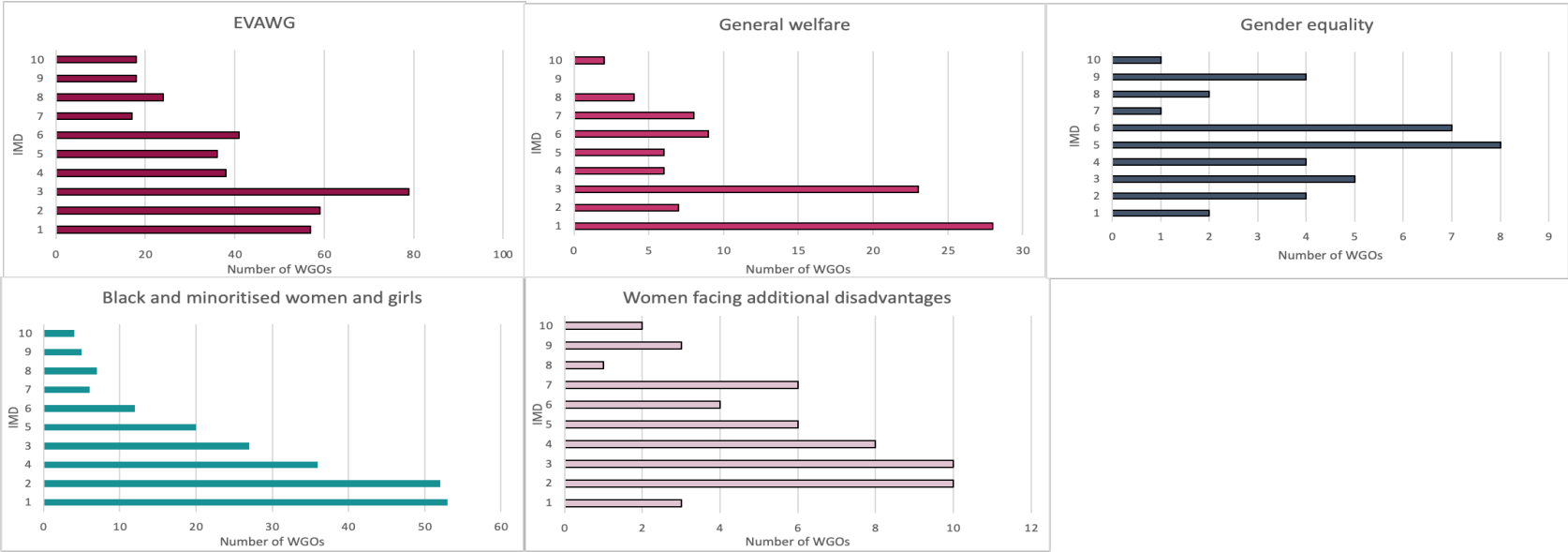
Figure fourteen below shows changes in the locations of WGOs by region between 2008 and 2018. There is a drop in number across all English regions and Wales. The greatest losses were felt in the South West, Wales and the East. London had the least change between 2008 and 2018. The area with the lowest number of WGOs per 100k population in 2008 was London (6.69), but in 2018 this was Yorkshire and the Humber (4.6) and the West Midlands (5.97).

**Figure fourteen: WGO location in Wales and English region per 100k population**



Figure fifteen below shows the distribution of selected WGOs by index of multiple deprivation (IMD) decile where 1= most deprived and 10=least deprived. As a general pattern, the chart shows an inverse relationship between the location of these specific WGOs against area deprivation compared to the general trend for all WGOs shown in figure five above. A greater proportion of organisations which are EVAWG, general welfare, for women facing additional disadvantage or OBMWG are found in areas of higher deprivation. Gender equality organisations are grouped more toward the centre of the distribution.

Figure fifteen: Number of selected WGO types by Index of Multiple Deprivation (deciles 2018) using postcode data.



In this problem, there is an assumption that women and girls in more disadvantaged locations will be particularly in need of service provision due to the economic, social and political landscape. Demonstrating that organisations providing services to women and girls such as support with gender based violence are more likely to be located within disadvantaged areas is also important for highlighting the effects of austerity where location can mean reduced access to funding and greater demand on services for these WGOs (Clifford 2017). This study demonstrates that WGOs providing important services are more likely to be located in disadvantaged areas and as such they will be more likely to find it difficult to access sufficient income and to be affected by a greater demand on services.

#### **6.4.2 Section summary**

The detailed analysis across the period has made visible differences within the WGO sector and between and within different types of WGO. While some organisations have increased income for their work, others have experienced a decline. The detailed intersectional analysis has highlighted the specific difficulties for OBMWG and the types of organisations within this category. In terms of location, a detailed analysis has demonstrated that unlike all WGOs, many organisations supporting women and girls facing additional disadvantages were located in areas of higher levels of deprivation and that areas such as Wales, London and the North of England have the lowest levels of WGOs per 100k population with important effects on access to adequate provision. It has also raised questions for further research.

#### **6.5 Chapter summary**

A quantitative analysis is able to demonstrate a range of representations through variation in identification, categorisation, lines of enquiry, presentation and interpretation. This was highlighted in the methodology in chapter five and is also discussed further in chapter nine. This chapter has generated a representation of WGOs based on regulatory data from the Charity Commission for England and Wales and has contributed to our understanding of a women's and girls' sector. It has made visible for the first time what the WGO sector could look like, including consideration of location, size and activity type and has enabled useful comparison with the wider VCS sector. In doing this it has provided *an answer* to

the questions of who are the WGOs in England and Wales between 2008 and 2018, how are they represented in regulatory data and how has this changed?

It has demonstrated important different 'problem representations' that have arisen through the levels of analysis. The representation explored here has presented a picture that shows significant variation between WGOs, the fortunes and experiences of different organisation types and accessibility to WGOs by location. It has highlighted salient differences for specific organisations such as refuges, OBMWG and other disadvantaged groups.

While, according to this representation, WGOs declined in number between 2008 and 2018, they have also increased in income. However, this broad level analysis obscures the significant differences between organisation types during this period. Some organisation types have experienced a period of much more significant decline, whether this is by number (for example social organisations), or by level of income (for example organisations for lone parents).

There are organisation types that appear to have had a period of growth in number and income such as gender equality organisations but it is also important to note that in many instances this was from a very low base and that the gains therefore appear to be more significant.

For EVAWG organisations, the category masks a variety of fortunes for organisations within the grouping. Refuges have declined in number and income over the period while organisations offering support to people affected by sexual violence have generally received higher income levels. Others, such as organisations supporting women who have been affected by the criminal justice system and anti-trafficking organisations have had more periods of fluctuation. This representation has also shown a growth in the number of EVAWG organisations providing services to not just women. While still currently fewer in number than those offering women only services there is some evidence of a shift to include services for those other than women.

The representation also shows the lower levels of funding received by OBMWG and the importance of taking a more intersectional approach to analysing data. It



has been useful to explore OBMWG as a separate group but to also compare their changes alongside other WGOs.

The representation can also highlight key strengths within the sector. The number of organisations and the numbers of women and girls involved in or supported by WGOs are significant. The range of organisation types and the range and number of specialist organisations, many of whom have long histories of providing services to women and girls, is important to recognise and acknowledge.

Importantly, the identification and categorisation work has shown the constructed and subjective nature of building a representation of a group of organisations. It has also highlighted the ways in which the representations change depending on what is given prominence and visibility and what is excluded. It has also underlined that there is value in pursuing quantitative work of this nature from a feminist perspective in order to direct our focus to important detail and nuance and to the comparative experiences of specific disadvantaged groups.

## **Chapter seven: How are WGOs and their work represented in government policy documentation between 2008 and 2020?**

### **How does this change between 2008 and 2020?**

Government policy announcements and strategies offer opportunities to explore how government presents and envisages its priorities, work, and key partners in relation to specific topics or policy areas (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016). This includes insight into the way in which government views the scope and limits of its role and that of key partners and how it justifies the allocation of resources. It also enables a view of how this may change over time. The discourse contained in policy documents can be explored to provide access to the perceived understanding and construction of Women and Girls Organisations (WGOs) and their work and to reflect on the effects of this representation.

To consider how WGOs are represented in government policy within the boundaries of this research, it has been necessary to select a small number of policy areas to examine in depth. An alternative approach would be to select a wide range of policies but those would not allow the depth of analysis that is needed to make full use of the ‘what’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) approach. With WPR approach, the analysis “works backwards” from the proposed policy solutions to identify and unpick the ways in which the problem is represented in each document (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p20). For example:

“A government report may refer simply to the desirability of some condition such as “social cohesion”, signalling thereby that *lack of* social cohesion is represented or constituted to be a problem of sorts (emphasis in original).” (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p21)

This chapter is comprised of two sets of WPR analysis which were synthesised to explore common themes and differences. In line with the other elements of the qualitative research the focus is on documents that have been produced between 2008 and 2020. The first analysis explored a number of key overarching government policies toward the VCS since 2008 including Building the Big Society (2010), the Civil Society Strategy (2018) and Levelling up our communities (Kruger 2020). Levelling up our communities was commissioned by

the then Prime Minister Boris Johnson for government to prompt policy debate but is not a policy. It has been included here as the most recent document to provide an indication of the future direction of travel up to the end of 2020.<sup>14</sup>

The second analysis explored government documents in relation to three key areas of policy that relate to WGOs. It is important to note that these areas were selected due to their close links with the work of many women and girl charitable organisations, but the selection is not exhaustive. In fact, there are many other policy areas that could have been selected and which would have led to other representations. WGOs cover such a diverse range of themes and the lives of women are impacted by every policy area meaning many different policies could have been chosen. The areas that were selected were those where it may be reasonable to expect particular attention to be paid to WGOs including gender equality and ending violence against women and girls strategies, and strategies specifically for women who have been involved in the Criminal Justice System (CJS). There was a selection of a minimum of two documents per theme from across the period.

Summaries of each of the documents that were analysed were provided in chapter five (methodology). Here the focus is on the 'problems' that are represented from a synthesis of all of those documents. There are seven overarching 'problems' that emerged from the WPR analysis and which are the focus of this chapter. These are:

1. What is the VCS? What is a WGO?
2. Government alone cannot solve society's 'complex challenges' and people and communities don't have enough power to take responsibility for addressing these themselves.
3. Not all women are productive citizens.
4. Alternative sources of funding are needed.
5. Lack of capacity, information and awareness is holding back solutions.
6. The causes of gender inequality are not being addressed.

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<sup>14</sup> The Kruger report made recommendations to government, to which it responded on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2022.

7. The specific needs of women facing additional disadvantage are not being met.

These ‘problems’ were identified as recurrent themes throughout the individual documents and frequently across different policy areas. For each problem, examples of the text from the documents are displayed to increase the transparency of the findings, while accepting that alternate readings and further problem identification are also possible. The examples are listed both chronologically and in order of topic. Each of the WPR questions are addressed to the problem drawing on the range of documents. Finally, the chapter offers summary conclusions on how WGOs and their work are represented in government policy documents and changes between 2008 and 2020.

### 7.1 Problem one: What is the VCS? What is a WGO?

Examples from the documents	Source
“Five Foundations of social value: people, places, the social sector, the private sector and the public sector... Charities and social enterprises – the social sector- are the core of civil society.”	Civil Society Strategy (Cabinet Office 2018, p11-13).
“Civil society refers to individuals and organisations when they act with the primary purpose of creating social value, independent of state control. By social value we mean enriched lives and a fairer society for all.”	Civil Society Strategy (Cabinet Office 2018, p12).
“It is important to note that business is really part of civil society as simply another way in which people choose to carry out their social relations and therefore it too must consider the purpose it serves outside itself.”	Levelling up our communities (Kruger 2020, p14).
“The women’s voluntary and community sector is dedicated to its role in protecting women and girls from violence and to the provision of adequate and consistent services to help victims.”	Call to end violence against women and girls (Home Office 2010, p18).

<p>“Alternatives to custody are one means of supporting women offenders. For example, women’s community projects or ‘one-stop-shops’ are a central hub where women who are in the criminal justice system can access support at any point.... support is also provided to women who have been abused, raped or experienced domestic violence.”</p>	<p>Call to end violence against women and girls (Home Office 2010, p26-27).</p>
<p>“Collaboration is vital to achieving the aims of this strategy...in preparation for the strategy I hosted a number of roundtables with practitioners and representatives from the women’s sector. As always, I was impressed with the passion and commitment shown by those who work in this area.”</p>	<p>Violence against women and girls strategy 2016-2020 (Home Office 2016, p7).</p>
<p>“The third sector network of women’s services such as women’s centres play an important role in supporting us to meet women’s needs, minimise disruption to families and more effectively maintain female offenders within their community as productive citizens, at less cost to government and greater benefit to themselves and society.”</p>	<p>The Female offender strategy (Ministry of Justice 2018, p6).</p>

***What is the problem and what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem”? Are there gendered assumptions?***

The problem here is the difficulty in identifying what a voluntary and community sector is or what WGOs are. In **Building the Big Society**, the VCS is defined by listing the component parts. In the **Civil society strategy**, a number of new ways to identify and conceptualise the space are evident. A ‘social sector’ is introduced which is seen as different from a private sector, public sector, people and places which together comprise the five foundations of social value. Social value is defined as “enriched lives and a fairer society for all” (2018, p12). The ‘social sector’ is the term used for charities and social enterprises who are the core (not therefore the only members) of civil society and one source (amongst the other four ‘foundations’) of generating social value. Civil society in turn refers to:

“Individuals and organisations when they act with the primary purpose of creating social value.” (2018, p12).

From the range of concepts, it is possible to deduce that social value can therefore be produced from all sectors (private, public, people and places as well as the social sector).

**Levelling up our communities (Kruger 2020)** extends this concept further to include the private sector as part of 'civil society' which, if the same terms are used as for the Civil Society strategy, now joins the 'core' of charities and social enterprise in this space. This is important because it has shifted the conception of civil society as distinct from the private and public sector and is blurring boundaries to suggest that the private sector, charities and social enterprise may be located at one pole, distinct from the public sector. If such proposals are focused on reducing the state, then anything that exists outside of the public sector is legitimately achieving this goal. If there is little difference between the private and social sectors conceived as all generating social value, then it is a matter of deciding along a continuum of what is generating 'enough' social value to meet this requirement. This could have a deleterious impact on VCS organisations whose claims to 'distinction' (Macmillan 2013) may be based on generating social value and being 'not for profit'.

This supports literature that discusses how definitions of the sector and the terms which are used by different governments are fluid and indicative of the contested nature of the VCS (Alcock 2010). In this way they reflect the elements that they wish to emphasise or represent as the sector. There is a widening interpretation of the space in which the VCS is located which can therefore bring more actors in to the realm. This means that in the allocation and justification of resources, there are more actors that can be funded to deliver services in a space that may otherwise have been reserved for VCS organisations.

Across the VCS policy documents there is also little mention of the diversity of VCS organisations or the myriad types of different organisations that the VCS represents including WGOs. The description of the VCS does not account for or mention the gendered nature of the VCS where women are the majority of staff and volunteers (NCVO 2019).

In policies relating more specifically to women and girls, there is no explicit definition of a WGO. The **Call to end violence against women and girls** document describes the role of a 'women's voluntary and community sector' as protecting women and girls from violence and the provision of services to help victims. In this way, it conceptualises WGOs as specifically EVAWG organisations and those engaged in providing direct services to aid women and girls who have been affected. This excludes organisations that are not EVAWG organisations (such as health, advice, campaigning, and social organisations) and limits the understanding to one of service delivery rather than the wider range of activity that WGOs may carry out and who may also be contributing to this agenda through broader gender equality work.

In the **Female offender strategy (2018)** the term women's voluntary and community sector is replaced with a 'third sector network of women's services'. First, the use of the term 'third sector' here instead of 'social sector' or 'civil society' suggests differing definitions across government departments. Second, this descriptor particularly focuses on a 'network' of women's services and draws attention to links between a series of organisations for women but not necessarily a 'sector' or a specific more closely aligned group, that the term 'sector' would suggest. Again, as above, there is a particular focus on providing services for women as the main determinant. Furthermore, their role is interestingly described as 'supporting us' to meet the needs of women, rather than the role of government to support WGOs to meet the needs of women, raising wider debates about whose role it may be to meet these needs.

A primary goal of WGOs within the **Female offender strategy** is framed as supporting women to minimise disruption to families and ensure female offenders are productive citizens 'at less cost to government'. The issues of women as 'productive citizens' are discussed further below but it is important to note here the gendered nature of this conceptualisation of women's responsibility for causing 'disruption' to families and the role therefore of WGOs in supporting women to become 'productive citizens'.

***How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?***

This representation has arisen in the context of a change of government from 2010 onwards which was focused on implementing austerity measures including cuts to public service provision and a smaller state. A decreased role for the state necessitates more involvement by other actors in the delivery of services and particularly lower cost provision. The increased inclusion of the VCS and volunteering therefore becomes an important strategy for reducing public expenditure (Levitas 2012, Corbett and Walker 2013). A focus on the VCS as providing services becomes dominant because of this focus on how to provide services within the financial constraints of austerity.

***What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be conceptualised differently?***

Defining a VCS is not acknowledged to be problematic and is presented without accepting it may be open to contestation and have implications for policymaking. A common understanding of what constitutes a WGO is assumed, and again definitions are not provided. Instead, key activities are listed with a primary focus on delivering support services to women and girls.

Extending the scope of civil society to include the private sector (Kruger 2020) is not seen as problematic even though the private sector cannot be said to be acting with the primary purpose of ‘creating social value’ (Cabinet Office 2018) and is more closely aligned with profit generation.

***What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?***

Disregarding the contested nature of definitional work is problematic because it assumes fixity, and ignores that other definitions are possible by different actors, in different contexts and at different points in time. It also masks the purposes behind defining an object, issue, or concept in a particular way. The specific blurring of boundaries between the VCS and the private sector erodes the idea that the VCS is different from other sectors but also ignores differences such as a focus on profit by the private sector.

The lack of acknowledgement of the gendered nature of the VCS leads to policymaking which does not take sufficient account of the lives of women as



existing research has demonstrated (Women's Budget Group 2019). Similarly, a narrow understanding of WGOs' role in service delivery ignores the breadth of WGOs and their purposes and underplays their particular history as rooted in gender equality agendas.

***How and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?***

This representation has been produced in a number of government policy documents from different departments. It can be disrupted through recognising that defining the VCS or WGOs is open to contestation and that it can impact on their perceived purpose. It affects which policies they may be included in, which they are absent from, and what resources are provided to support them.

It can be replaced by reflecting on how different terms are used, acknowledging that definitions construct different ways of viewing the VCS with consequences for the organisations that are both included or excluded. Similarly, acknowledging the breadth of the VCS sector as well as the discrete groups within it, has the potential to make policy-making more appropriate and inclusive. The inclusion of gender as an important element of the VCS would also better take account of the impact of policy decision on women and girls.

**7.2 Problem two: Government alone cannot solve society's 'complex challenges' and people and communities don't have enough power to take responsibility for addressing these themselves.**

Examples from the documents	Source
“Government on its own cannot fix every problem. We are all in this together. We need to draw on the skills and expertise of people across the country as we respond to the social, political and economic challenges Britain faces... Only when people and communities are given more power and take more responsibility can we achieve fairness and opportunity for all”	Building the Big Society (Cabinet Office 2010, p1)
“We will introduce new powers to help communities save local facilities and services threatened with closure and give communities the right to bid to take over local state-run services.”	Building the Big Society (Cabinet Office 2010, p1)

“Government alone cannot solve the complex challenges facing society, such as loneliness, rough sleeping... Government can help to bring together the resources, policies and people who, between them, can do so.”	Civil Society Strategy (Cabinet Office 2018, p12).
“(We) recognise that not all places are at the same starting point and will take steps to ensure that efforts to support communities described in this strategy have the potential to benefit all communities, regardless of circumstance.”	Civil Society Strategy (Cabinet Office 2018, p13).
“Recent years have weakened the connecting tissues of our country, the institutions and gathering places and the people (from youth workers to librarians and all those working on informal and below the radar social projects) who bring people together and enable the common life of a community.”	Levelling up our communities (2020, p16).
“Before the welfare state, social support was provided by parishes, and by a patchwork of independent charities, foundation, friendly societies, mutuals, trade unions, co-operatives and churches... every faith has charity and particularly voluntary financial redistribution, at its heart...every religion has a duty of hospitality to the stranger and a duty to seek peace, every religions ugly record of intolerance is the exception to this far more generally observed rule, their values, their concern for the spiritual well-being of individuals and society, provide a motivation and commitment that often exceeds that of paid professionals.”	Levelling up our communities (Kruger 2020, p35).
“The women’s sector has always worked together to address violence against women and girls and to provide practical solutions in support of those who most need them. They are the experts in this field, and they have been speaking out for women and girls for decades. We want to build on their expertise...And we will support them in this through the provision of stable funding over the next four years.”	Call to end violence against women and girls (Home Office 2010, p20).
“Government can only do so much, however and we know that a one size fits all model does not exist. It is very important that local areas are able to work together to develop an approach that addresses their local needs, the needs of the women and girls affected, and to optimise their existing services and the capacity of the local community to respond effectively.”	Call to end violence against Women and Girls (Home Office 2010, P6).
“We need however to achieve a balance between encouraging local areas to take responsibility for tackling violence against women and girls and ensuring that as an issue which has been overlooked historically, it does not get marginalised.”	Call to end violence against women and girls (Home Office 2010, p6).
“It is by listening and learning from those who know what is needed on the frontline- the victims and survivors, and those who provide them with support – that we will achieve a sustainable and lasting change.”	Violence against women and girls strategy 2016-2020 (Home Office 2016, p5).

<p>"To develop our understanding of local provision, we reviewed domestic abuse services in 2015...(the) review indicated that ...Services have grown organically over time with many areas struggling with disparate local funding streams, short term funding and disjointed local commissioning practices..."</p>	<p>Violence against women and girls strategy 2016-2020 (Home Office 2016, p29).</p>
<p>"We want local areas who service structures to take a joined up multi agency approach to addressing the barriers that prevent women with multiple and complex needs from accessing services effectively...to deliver this we want to see sufficient, gender-informed provision in local areas to meet the needs of female offenders."</p>	<p>The Female offender strategy (Ministry of Justice 2018, p12).</p>
<p>"Government will act as a leader, a catalyst, and an advocate for change. We will continue to make targeted interventions where these will make a real difference, but on its own government can only ever make limited progress. We will work with people, communities and businesses to empower them to enact change."</p>	<p>The equality strategy- building a fairer Britain (Government Equalities Office 2010, p24).</p>

***What is the problem and what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem"? Are there gendered assumptions?***

The presented problem is that government is unable to meet the social, economic, and political challenges facing society alone. There are three main deeper assumptions here. One is that, faced with the economic crisis, there is a need to cut back public spending, the second is that the problems are 'too complex' and it is not appropriate for government to try to solve them alone and the third is that the VCS needs the freedom to take on more responsibility for enacting change.

The **Building the Big Society** document states that 'we are all in this together' serving as a device to unite a will to face the economic crisis through the assumed need for austerity policies. The **Civil Society Strategy**, **Equality Strategy** and the **Call to end violence against women and girls** all specify that the issues facing society are too large or complex for government to solve alone. The **Equality strategy - building a fairer Britain** focuses on the role of government to lead, be a catalyst and an advocate but only make targeted interventions. In each instance, the goal is to assist 'others' in finding solutions who are variously defined in a number of documents. In **Building the Big Society** these are

“mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises” (Cabinet Office 2010), while in the **Civil Society Strategy** these are “public services, businesses, and communities” and “new providers” where the government will take on a facilitative role (Cabinet Office 2018). In the **Ending violence against women and girls strategy** government states that they “will help ensure that our partners and local communities have the resources and tools they need to provide a robust response” (Home Office 2016). Across a wide variety of policy areas therefore, a commitment to moving away from the central state which is positioned as unable to ‘act alone’ and toward the inclusion of alternative and more diverse providers can be seen. The justification for these draws on the economic crisis and the complexity of issues facing society.

The documents describe a lack of power and responsibility for people and communities to ‘take on’ facilities and services. The representation is extended further to include communities saving local facilities which are at risk of closure. It is assumed that with increased power at a local level, communities will be able to provide these directly. There is an assumption that a function of the VCS is to provide facilities and services. While many do so, it is not the case for all VCS organisations, many of whom may be focused on social or sports activities, campaign work or other non-service delivery activities. Focusing on VCS organisations as agents of public service delivery skews the representation of the sector which is both more diverse and has multiple purposes and forms as well as organisations’ own agendas and direction.

There is also an assumption that VCS inclusion in public services should be universally welcomed but clearly the scope and scale of involvement and the types of services that could or should be provided by the VCS is more contentious and open to debate. There is no consensus on what activities are the responsibility of the state and which are those of the VCS and indeed these are boundaries that have been debated and have shifted over time (Brewis et al., 2021).

Furthermore, there is a general assumption that all VCS provision furthers equality. While Kruger acknowledges ‘an ugly record of intolerance’ by every religion (Kruger 2020), there is a normative commitment to the inherently better

level of motivation and commitment in faith organisations than that given by paid professionals. An emphasis on faith communities, while acknowledging their value and input into society should also take account of the limitations of organisations which may not be appropriate for all, are not always progressive and do not always support the rights of all, particularly women. The **Civil Society Strategy** describes civil society as creating “social value” by which is meant “enriched lives and a fairer society for all” (Cabinet Office 2018). Once again, while many civil society organisations may have an aim to tackle inequality, not all civil society organisations would see this as a central goal or would necessarily create a fairer society for all.

Underpinning this problem is an explicit assumption that local is the right level to solve problems and that localities are inherently inclusive. The assumption that local action can solve inequality suggests that sources of inequality originate in local communities. This is problematic for addressing issues of gender (and other) inequalities which operate at a structural level at and within all levels of society. As such a more complex understanding is needed that recognises that action is needed at multiple levels and across all areas of society.

There is recognition of WGOs in a similar way to the broader VCS. While noting their work in ‘speaking out’ and as ‘experts in the field’ the role of the state is to support them through stable funding for specific and limited activities. In the longer term, the goal is to support the women’s sector to have ‘a strong voice at the local level’, where responsibility for funding is to be shifted and where WGOs will therefore have to compete for funding through local commissioning arrangements.

### ***How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?***

In a time of economic crisis followed by austerity and the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, government has sought to capitalise on the benefits of the VCS to deliver services and emphasises the value and history of the sector to achieve this. The actors that are called upon to take on the various roles vary from lists of types of VCS organisations, to the inclusion of public services and business, and partners. Kruger in particular draws on nostalgic imagery of a time before the welfare state where social support was provided by a ‘patchwork’ of VCS providers (Kruger

2020), neglecting to acknowledge that this support was replaced by a welfare state in an effort to create more equitable and universal provision. These representations are consistent with the government's ideological commitment to a small central state and the perceived need for a wide variety of actors, agents, organisations, and sectors to take on responsibility and action to deliver services. It is also compatible with notions of individual responsibility where citizens are encouraged to take on responsibility for themselves albeit in this context, within the framework of their community.

For WGOs specifically, the representation is about a shift from central to local funding for the sector and the move for those WGOs who are supported centrally to engage with local commissioning arrangements for their funding (primarily EVAWG organisations). The women's sector is again used primarily in reference to EVAWG organisations such as organisations supporting women and girls affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence.

***What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be conceptualised differently?***

The issues facing society may very well be complex and require the involvement of a wide range of actors to find solutions. While there are debates about the appropriate role of the state, it remains a key decision-maker and source of financial resource and thus, a dominant player in society with significant power and responsibility to help find solutions. It is therefore problematic if the government is limiting its responsibility to developing the number and range of organisations outside of the state to take on delivery of public services and focusing primarily on facilitation.

Limited responsibility for the state is a core message in **Building the Big Society** but as the period progresses, in the **Civil Society Strategy** there is acknowledgement that the state has taken on services which were originally within the 'social sector' and that this has been beneficial for ensuring increased access and trust:

"Many of our public services began life outside government often in the social sector...over time government stepped in to support and extend the work done by communities and private philanthropy. This has helped

ensure high standards as well as universal access and created a system- the welfare state- which people can trust". (Cabinet Office 2018, p16).

In **Levelling up our communities** government maintains a role (if not a central one) in mediating for disadvantaged groups. In relation to **Ending violence against women and girls**, government indicates it has a role in centrally funding some core provisions such as national helplines but that it wishes to reduce its responsibility to local areas for the provision of services.

Austerity as a guiding frame for policies is not discussed within these documents. It is taken as an assumption that this is the course of action that must be taken. Furthermore, the austerity measures that have been in place to reduce public expenditure have led to cuts to services and closures, but this is not acknowledged or represented within these documents and the question of where the threat of closure comes from is overlooked. In this way, central government is positioned as helping communities through the proposed new policies, without acknowledging any responsibility for the cuts that have caused facilities and services to be closed.

There is no further discussion about whether communities want, or which communities may be in a better position than others, to take on such roles. There are few commitments to addressing the fact that communities have vastly different experiences, access to resources and power that may help or hinder efforts to address community need. Given these disparities, the idea that communities will protect and promote the rights of the vulnerable seems a little optimistic. This representation also fails to capture differences within the VCS where inequality and exclusion in wider society can also be replicated and where organisations may not be progressive or inclusive (Ubele initiative 2021, Lingayah et al. 2020).

Within the VCS documents the sector becomes synonymous with 'communities' primarily defined geographically and is framed as existing to meet the problems of society. For WGOs, there are particular issues with the 'localism' agenda. Although some WGOs may be located within a particular community of place they may serve women from further afield and may associate more strongly with other

women's organisations or disadvantaged groups rather than their local neighbourhood, for example organisations focused on gender equality or tackling violence against women.

'Providers' stepping in to provide domestic abuse and offender services are celebrated as models for the future, but it is unclear which providers are being referred to and whether there are some providers which are better suited to run these services. Within the female offender's strategy there are calls for the provision of 'gender-informed' services in local areas to meet the needs of female offenders (Ministry of Justice 2018). While referring to gender as an important part of the provision there is no definition of what 'gender-informed' may mean and which kinds of organisations may be able to offer this. There is no clarity on whether this specifically relates to WGOs or relates to any organisation that can offer a 'gender-informed' approach, however that is defined. The inclusion of a range of actors and agencies from outside the state to provide services creates ambiguity about who will be providing which services and how this will be determined. The generic term 'providers' encompasses those from the private or voluntary sector and does not distinguish between who is 'stepping in' or the suitability of the provider to best meet the needs of women. We know that there has been a loss of specialist women only provision (TUC 2015, Women's Resource Centre 2020) and that generic private sector organisations have been more successful at bidding to run services, therefore receiving disproportionate and unequal access to contracts. Furthermore, the role of the 'gender-informed' provision is to address barriers that prevent women accessing services effectively. There is a focus here on removing barriers to accessing services as a primary function of WGOs, rather than broader social change.

### ***What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?***

There are a range of implications for women more broadly as well as women's organisations. The assumption that 'people' will take on more responsibility within communities overlooks the gendered nature of volunteering where women do the most unpaid work (Levitas 2012, Pearson 2019) and where the VCS itself is dominated by women's employment, volunteering and charitable giving (NCVO 2019). Furthermore, the literature review highlighted that women have been disproportionately affected by the austerity measures (The Fawcett Society 2013,



The Runnymede Trust 2017 and Women's Budget Group 2019) and therefore are under increased pressure at a time when government is asking them to take on more community-based work.

For women's organisations austerity has led to increased demands on services and has implications for their capacity to be able to deliver on additional commitments, as noted by Hirst and Rinne (2012). Yet gender, women and women's organisations are all absent in wider VCS documents. Failure to sufficiently acknowledge gender, means that women's organisations are not recognised within notions of a place-based VCS and consequently are missed when resultant policy development and action follows from these proposals.

There is an assumption that VCS organisations map well on to communities of place, but this does not sufficiently account for the diversity within the sector; one which is also comprised of many organisations organised around common aims or issues that are not place based such as WGOs or those focused on the needs of specific disadvantaged groups.

The literature review in chapter three identified that local service commissioning is problematic for WGOs where systems for commissioning services can be designed in ways which create barriers for smaller organisations and favour larger organisations. There is no acknowledgement within the documents of competition within local funding environments, particularly as funding is constrained. Nor is there discussion of how WGOs beyond having a 'strong voice' will be able to adequately secure funding for their work in this environment.

***How and where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced. Disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?***

This representation has been produced in a number of government policy documents from different departments. The representation can be disrupted through questioning whether austerity is the right approach to move on from the economic crisis, in terms of its prospects for economic recovery and concerns about social justice. Certainly, it has attracted a significant number of prominent critics that would suggest that this is not the case, as noted in chapter three

(Krugman 2012, Stiglitz 2017). It is also questionable the extent to which actors from outside the state can solve society's complex problems in isolation either. The extent to which the state should have a role, and the nature of this role, is a subject of intense debate.

An alternative representation could include organisations that do not necessarily fit within locality-based understanding of the sector. It could recognise that not all problems can be solved at local level and that even if they could the money and resources at a local level may not be sufficient. Power dynamics and resource constraints at a local level may mean that even if there is local evidence of the need for WGOs that they may not be prioritised amongst a wealth of other competing needs. The representation can also be replaced by recognising that gender is an issue that needs to be integrated into wider policies including those specifically for the VCS.

### 7.3 Problem three: Not all women are productive citizens

Examples from the documents	Source
"More victims are helped to rebuild their lives and their social productivity fully."	Call to end violence against women and girls (Home Office 2010, p18).
"Underlying causes of women's offending most commonly involve drug and alcohol addiction, high levels of mental health problems and histories of violent and sexual abuse. Almost half of women prisoners report having suffered from violence at home and about one third report having suffered sexual abuse."	Call to end violence against women and girls (Home Office 2010, p26).
"The human cost of VAWG is high. Experiences of abuse have serious psychological, emotional and physical consequences and may contribute to multiple disadvantages or a chaotic lifestyle... That 41% of the prison population have witnessed or experiences domestic abuse is illustrative of the wider social harms these crimes cause."	Violence against women and girls 2016-2020 (Home Office 2016, p8).
"Women's prison population has increased by 94% over the last 10 years, compared to 38% increase for men. Courts have been using custody more frequently for women for less serious offences... up to 80% of women have a diagnosable mental health problem and many are drug/alcohol dependent. Around half report they have been abused and a third sexually abused."	Delivering the Government response to the Corston Report (Ministry of Justice 2008, p3).

“The third sector network of women’s services such as women’s centres play an important role in supporting us to meet women’s needs, minimise disruption to families and more effectively maintain female offenders within their community as productive citizens, at less cost to government and greater benefit to themselves and society.”	The Female Offender strategy (Ministry of Justice 2018, p6).
“There is a clear opportunity to take an entirely different approach to this cohort- one that addresses vulnerability, acknowledges the role of gender, treats female offenders as individuals with the potential to make a positive contribution to wider society and ultimately breaks the cycle of reoffending with all the benefits that brings...”	The Female Offender Strategy (Ministry of Justice 2018, p5).
“The incarceration of women may also have a disproportionate impact on intergenerational offending as they are more likely to be living with their children prior to custody.”	The Female Offender strategy (Ministry of Justice 2018, p6).

***What is the problem and what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem”? Are there gendered assumptions?***

The problem is that not all women are ‘productive citizens’. In a **Call to end violence against women and girls** it is emphasised that an important goal for women affected by violence is to rebuild their lives and *their productivity*. For women in the **Call to end violence against women strategy** and **The Female offender strategy**, being a productive citizen is tied to gendered notions of women’s role as carers. Women’s organisations are recognised as valuable in their role of supporting public sector cost-saving and service-delivery ensuring that individual women who have offended are supported to become ‘productive citizens’.

***How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?***

This representation has in large part arisen due to a need to address the issue of an increasing female prison population. The Corston report (Home Office 2007) that predates these policies, identified a number of issues with the treatment of women who have offended which sets the context for this ‘policy problem’ including highlighting the particular needs of women who have had difficulties with their mental health, have suffered abuse and have often committed less serious crimes but have received more severe sentencing. As a result, recommendations were made to offer more support, and reduce the prison population by providing alternatives. The policies here build on that legacy.

Importantly though, the desire to reduce the prison population is also one of cost-saving where the cost to the state of providing imprisonment needs to be reduced, in a climate of economic crisis and reductions in state expenditure.

The problem representation is also underpinned by the construction of a role of the 'productive citizen' who is envisaged to be someone who contributes to society. For women this is tied to caring responsibilities and the need to look after *their* children and ensure the prevention of intergenerational offending.

***What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be conceptualised differently?***

The problem centres on women who are not productive citizens, as they are assumed to not be working and taking care of their children. In a **call to end violence against women and girls** it is recognised that many of the women who have offended have been subject to abuse and have issues with poor mental health and drug and alcohol dependency and that they need support with these issues. These issues are seen as the 'root causes' of offending for many of the women. This is problematic, as they are characterised as individualised issues, one for the women to resolve without considering the role of broader structural barriers in creating those issues. There is little reflection on why the individual women may experience some of these issues and how this may be linked to wider inequalities that they face, particularly the role of gender inequality and its links to sexual and/or domestic abuse.

In 2016, **Ending violence against women and girls strategy** however, the issue of VAWG is more clearly linked to the experiences of women who have offended or who are experiencing multiple disadvantages. While acknowledging the role of gender the **Female offender strategy** persists with an individualised account of the problems facing women who have offended.

“Offenders are part of our society, and we must take steps to understand and address the underlying causes of offending, if we are to improve the lives of victims and support offenders to turn *their own* lives around (emphasis added).” (Ministry of Justice 2018, p3).

***What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?***

This problem presentation often reinforces gender stereotypes through the concentration on women in their caring role and as responsible for their children and families. It also suggests that unless women are working or caring for their children that they are ‘unproductive’ which negates other contributions that women may make and deems the unproductive woman as less valuable to society.

The individual difficult circumstances that many women have experienced is acknowledged, such as the high prevalence of abuse and mental ill-health but limited to an understanding at an individual level. The individual woman is responsible for resolving these issues albeit with access to support, yet there is no commitment to tackling the wider inequality issues that make women more likely to be subject to abuse in the first place.

***How and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?***

This representation is also at odds with the stated wider recognition of structural inequality within EAWG and gender equality policies. It is possible to disrupt and replace this representation through such a focus on wider inequalities that mean that women suffer from abuse and to examine why the definition of a ‘productive citizen’ for women is tied to caring responsibilities and work.

**7.4 Problem four: Alternative sources of funding are needed**

<b>Examples from the documents</b>	<b>Source</b>
“We will take a range of measures to encourage charitable giving and philanthropy.”	Building the Big Society (Cabinet Office 2010, p2).
“SIBS and outcome contracts...encourage innovation, align incentives, de-risk the taxpayer and bring in private capital which is frequently recycled back into the project or rolled forward into another one.”	Levelling up our communities (Kruger 2020, p23).

<p>“The new social model that is emerging has a major place for faith communities...the faith group would commit to fully funding this work from its own resources.”</p>	<p>Levelling up our communities (Kruger 2020, p36).</p>
<p>“Recently Rape crisis England and Wales alerted us to the funding challenges faced at a local level by rape crisis centres.”</p>	<p>Tackling violence against women: a cross-government narrative (Home Office 2008, p23).</p>
<p>“Another example (of new models and ways of working) is the Women’s Resource Centre pilot which is a two-year project...specifically researching the social return on investment for women’s organisations...we will use this work to help inform commissioning at local level.”</p>	<p>Call to end violence against women and girls (Home Office 2010, p18).</p>
<p>“As well as the government’s commitment to support existing rape crisis centre provision on a stable basis and to establish new centres the Home Office has allocated a flat cash settlement of over £28m...we recognise that the majority of funding for work to tackle violence against women and girls will continue to come from local authorities and other funding sources.”</p>	<p>Call to end violence against women and girls (Home Office 2010 p15).</p>
<p>“Over the next four years, the government will provide £80 million funding for VAWG services. We will take a phased approach in providing central funding to maintain critical services and sequence service transformation. From April 2017 onwards, local service provision will be supported through a new VAWG transformation fund.”</p>	<p>Violence against women and girls’ strategy 2016-2020 (Home Office 2016, p31-32).</p>
<p>“We recognise the value of and need to provide funding for core services as well as innovations. Funding for rape and sexual abuse support services continues to be made available to fund essential service provision and basic organisational needs such as rent. We are working with the five PCC test areas that will take on full local commissioning responsibility for sexual violence support from April 2019 to ensure they also recognise the importance of providing funding for core services.”</p>	<p>Ending violence against women and girls 2016-2020: strategy refresh (Home Office 2019, p26)</p>
<p>“In response to the increasing number of victims of sexual violence coming forward to access support, we have increased the funding for rape and sexual abuse specialist support services across England and Wales – offering £24m over three years to provide advice, support and counselling for victims of sexual violence and abuse.”</p>	<p>Ending violence against women and girls 2016-2020: strategy refresh (Home Office 2019, p27).</p>

"We recognise that specialist organisations often struggle to win funding from local commissioning channels and in competition with mainstream organisations."	Transforming the response to domestic abuse (Home Office and Ministry of Justice 2019 p35).
"We would like to see local agencies and commissioners working with us and investing in women's centres and other women-specific services. We recognise the critical role that they have played in supporting the sustainability of women's community services such as women's centres."	The Female offender strategy (Ministry of Justice 2018, p13).
"We are grateful for the role which charitable trusts and foundations have played in supporting women's community services."	The Female offender strategy (Ministry of Justice 2018, p13).
"We will provide a £100 million transition fund to help those voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, co-operatives and user-led groups in England who can provide public services, manage transition to a tighter funding environment and a new way of working with the public sector."	The equality strategy-building a fairer Britain (Government Equalities Office 2010, p18).

***What is the problem and what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem"? Are there gendered assumptions?***

The problem is that alternative sources of funding are needed for the VCS. The government is reducing public expenditure and as such VCS services will need to be funded from other sources. Several proposals for alternative funding sources and mechanisms are contained in the documents including social enterprise development, Social Impact Bonds (SIBS), funding by the faith sector, private sector funding, philanthropy and increased opportunities to deliver commissioned services.

**Building the Big Society** states that private philanthropy and charitable giving will be encouraged to support the Big Society. Meanwhile **Levelling up our communities** specifies the importance of social investment models such as SIBS and proposes extensive funding by the faith sector for the VCS (Kruger 2020). A number of the documents also outlined transitional funding to move from an 'old

model' of funding to the 'new models' for example the transformation fund in the **Violence against women and girls strategy 2016-2020** and transition funding in **The equality strategy- building a fairer Britain**.

In 2008, in **Tackling violence against women: a cross-government narrative** government appeared to express surprise at funding challenges for Rape Crisis centres. This was prior to the commencement of austerity policies and an indicator that there were already issues of a shortage of funding within the sector. In 2010 a **Call to end violence against women and girls** proposes the Social Impact Bond (SIBs) model as a suitable potential source of funding for EVAWG organisations to ensure that fewer victims are referred on a repeat basis to services. It also commits funding to support rape crisis centres 'on a stable basis' and 'a flat cash settlement of over £28m' (Home Office 2010). There is a persistent commitment to ensure that most of the funding for work to tackle violence against women and girls needs to be from local authorities and other funding sources.

This is echoed within **The Female offender strategy** where there is a call for local agencies and commissioners to specifically invest in women's centres and recognition of the role of charitable trusts and foundations as important funders of women's services. In the **Violence against women and girls strategy 2016-2020** further support is offered to the sector, and while there appears to be greater recognition of the difficulties that have been faced by WGOs and a process of 'transition', there is still a commitment to local commissioning being responsible for support for the sector (Home Office 2016).

Following the increase in referrals to sexual violence services as a result of a number of high-profile cases, funding for rape and sexual abuse specialist support services was increased in the **2019 Ending violence against women and girls strategy refresh**. A shift in the discourse was noticeable recognising the particular difficulties facing specialist services. This was also echoed in **Transforming the response to domestic abuse** where it is explicitly stated that specialist organisations often struggle to be funded through commissioning processes (Home Office and Ministry of Justice 2019). There are offers of



financial support for EAWG organisations but the discourse centres on the continued commitment to local funding mechanisms.

***How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?***

Government continues to see itself as having a limited role and limited funding due to the deficit reduction and austerity policies outlined above. Simultaneously, toward the end of the period there are difficulties for WGOs with accessing funding at local levels particularly for specialist organisations and demand on services was increasing. Government therefore is also continuing to provide some central funding although this comes with the caveat that it is ‘transitional’.

This representation is tied to broader understandings of where responsibility for funding WGOs should lie. WGOs are independent from the state although for those which are focused on EAWG, reliant on state funding to provide their services more comprehensively. EAWG organisations in particular exist in a space where their independence from the state is seen as valuable to women and girls, the organisation and the state but simultaneously this may result in receiving a lower level of investment than a mainstream statutory service would receive. This results in an ongoing tension between seeking recognition and financial support for the organisations and their work as a vital independent service.

***What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be conceptualised differently?***

Commentators have argued that austerity is an extension of neo-liberal state reduction (Taylor-Gooby 2011, Cooper and Whyte 2017, Clarke and Newman 2012) and here we can observe how the problem of needing to identify other sources of funding for services is a move toward state reduction, with a heightened role for social enterprise, business, faith organisations and charitable trusts and foundations. Local commissioning also plays a role in seeking to reduce the cost for the provision of services through a competitive tendering process.

While ever there is a continued need for services, the model relies on the availability of sufficient funding through these alternative sources. It also relies on

fundors being willing or able to fund all types of work, particularly when it is known that some causes and types of organisations are more able to attract funding than others (Salamon 1987). Furthermore, organisations would need to be in a position to successfully compete for contracts in a competitive market focused on cost-saving and scaled provision, where larger organisations and private sector organisations are known to be more successful (TUC 2015). Furthermore, local authorities have received significant cuts through austerity measures and as such have much more limited budgets for local service provision and the environment is therefore very competitive.

The Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence or Istanbul Convention 2011 sets out minimum standards that European countries need to have in their legislation. This was recently ratified by the UK government (while reserving a key amendment to protect migrant women) after a ten year delay, in November 2022. The convention commits the government to ensuring a range of provision for women and girls affected by gender based violence such as sufficient specialist women's services and access to a local, easily accessible shelter for women and children and rape crisis or sexual violence centres (Council of Europe n.d.). This will likely have an impact on how the relationship between EVAWG organisations and the state develops in the future.

***What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?***

Women's organisations, particularly those working with the most vulnerable women such as those affected by domestic abuse or violence, those affected by poverty, ill-health or disability and women from Black and minoritised backgrounds, are rarely able to generate income from their client group. Historically they have also not been able to attract sufficient philanthropic funding due to the lack of support from the public for their work, although this may now be changing with renewed and increased interest in addressing issues of gender based violence. They are often smaller organisations with limited resources and a lack of capacity to prepare bids for contracts or to provide cost savings through scale, for public sector contracts. The reliance on local commissioning, income generation or other alternative sources of funding for WGOs is problematic and has had the effect of pushing WGOs into a more precarious funding position.

Simultaneously, shifting the responsibility for funding to local authorities who have received funding cuts neglects the fact that they lack the resources to be able to meet the local need.

***How and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?***

This problem is repeated across all policy areas. It can be disrupted through questioning the assumption that austerity is needed as an appropriate policy strategy (Krugman 2012, Stiglitz 2017). The focus on funding shortages, the limited discourse that assumes that no money can be found, and that austerity and state reduction are the only paths forward are limiting and close opportunities for wider discussion of alternatives. The shifts to other funders of services also raise important questions about where the appropriate responsibility should lie for the provision of services such as ending violence against women and girls support, but again these are absent.

**7.5 Problem five: Lack of capacity, information and awareness is holding back solutions**

Examples from the documents	Source
“We will create a new ‘right to data’ so that government held datasets can be requested and used by the public, and then published on a regular basis.”	Building the Big Society (Cabinet Office 2010, p3)
“The government will work with the Centre for Acceleration of Social technology and other partners to explore how best to build a responsive, resilient and agile social sector.”	Civil Society Strategy (Cabinet Office 2018, p84).
“A new determination across civil society to provide comprehensive, comprehensible and comparable data on their activities, finances and outcomes.”	Levelling up our communities (Kruger 2020, p16).
“The government also wants to introduce minimum standards and consistency into the kind of services being made available to help and support both victims and perpetrators. To this end, we are working to develop national occupational standards with the voluntary sector organisations that deal with domestic and sexual violence. Draft service standards have already been prepared by the charity Women’s Aid.”	Tackling violence against women: a cross-government narrative (Home Office 2008, p15).
“We will ensure that there is greater transparency and accountability for how effective the local areas [are] in responding to this issue. We will do this by opening up data and information to the women’s sector and	Call to end violence against women and girls

the general public to help them work with public services and make the case for tackling violence against women and girls as a local as well as a national policy.”	(Home Office 2010, p7).
“We will make sure that all partnerships have access to the best examples of local practice, along with the data, tools and information they need to provide an integrated, effective, whole family approach to addressing and stopping violence and abuse.”	Ending violence against women and girls strategy 2016-2020 (Home Office 2016, p5).
“The Home Office has also funded Lime Culture a leading sexual violence training and development organisation to support the sexual violence voluntary sector by building capacity and capability to deliver high-quality, innovative and effective services.”	Ending violence against women and girls 2016-2020: strategy refresh (Home Office 2019, p27).
“We also recognise the benefits of providing services through smaller, specialist organisations that are embedded within and part of the communities they serve. However, these organisations can struggle to compete with larger scale competitors with greater experience in applying for grants, so we will continue to work to build capability within specialist sectors as we did by investing nearly £400,000 (£100,000 from the Home Office; nearly £300,000 from MHCLG) to Imkaan to build capacity in the specialist BME sector.”	Ending violence against women and girls 2016-2020: strategy refresh (Home Office 2019, p29).
“We are funding several projects to improve community awareness of domestic abuse...We recognise that there is a need to provide more information to the public”.	Transforming the response to domestic abuse (Home Office and Ministry of Justice 2019, p13-14).
“Shining a light on inequalities and giving individuals and local communities the tools and information, they need to challenge organisations that are not offering fair opportunities and public services that are not delivering effectively for all the people they serve”	The equality strategy- building a fairer Britain (Government Equalities Office 2010, p9).
“We will deepen the evidence base around the root causes of gendered aspirations and attitudes”	Gender equality at every stage (Government Equalities Office 2019, p10).
“The decisions that people make throughout their lives about work and care can have a huge cumulative effect across their lifetime, with women ending up much worse off financially than men”	Gender equality at every stage (Government Equalities Office 2019, p3).

***What is the problem and what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem”? Are there gendered assumptions?***

This problem representation features across many of the policy documents examined. The premise is that many of the issues facing society, including a lack

of funding for WGOs, VAWG and gender equality can be solved through better information collection and sharing, increased skills and use of technology.

This is based on a number of underlying assumptions. The first is that data is a neutral source of information and will provide an 'accurate' picture of any given phenomena. This is known to be particularly problematic in the case of EVAWG where the under-reporting of incidents is known to be a significant issue and data on prevalence are unlikely to be accurate (Walby et al. 2017). This problem representation also assumes that if we have more information about the levels of issues such as VAWG then local communities will act upon that information to make the necessary changes to address this need. It neglects to consider that even with 'sufficient' data VAWG may still not be prioritised in an environment of competing needs.

There is an assumption that current providers are also unable to resolve society's problems such as gender inequality due to a lack of skills, knowledge or information. While there may be more skills, information and learning that can be gained by current providers, this alone would not address all of the barriers facing society. The scale and pervasive nature of issues such as gender inequality necessitate solutions at a much greater magnitude than can be drawn from just WGOs and its current level of resource.

The lack of information is also emphasised as a problem at an individual level. The assumption is that individuals do not have sufficient information about a range of issues such as 'what is a healthy relationship?', or 'gender stereotypes' or 'pensions and financial security' and with sufficient information they will be able to change their individual behaviour accordingly as rational individual actors.

### ***How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?***

A trend for bigger and better data has been progressing for a significant period, as the pace of technological advancement provides more and new ways to access information about our lives. There are many claims for the ways in which more data can improve decision-making but also many critics that point to its limitations, the recreation of bias and that it privileges certain forms of knowledge (D'ignazio and Klein 2020). It is also a reflection of a broader neo-liberal view of

individual rational actors who once provided with neutral information are able to make informed and rational decisions.

Capacity building has been a longstanding theme in VCS-state relations (Cairns et al. 2005). An increased interest in the sector as a key provider of services grew particularly from the New Labour government from 1997 onwards. Alongside this, it was identified that the VCS needed to become more professional and to develop new skills to take on this role (Cairns et al. 2005). This capacity building theme continues in these documents but is given more emphasis on capacity to participate in localism agendas and developing the capacity for WGOs to be able to access funding through local commissioning arrangements and can therefore be seen as being driven by a desire to shift the VCS toward government agendas.

***What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be conceptualised differently?***

The lack of neutrality in data has been discussed in relation to the quantitative analysis of this study in the theoretical framework (chapter four) and methodology (chapter five) and is analysed further in chapter nine. Debate, deliberation and reflection on what the cause of the issues are, and the development of appropriate solutions are also necessary.

This problem representation assumes that decisions are made in a neutral void. It doesn't take account of competing problems, agendas and bias and the complexity of decision-making processes where there is no guarantee that if a problem has been identified that resources will follow. This is particularly difficult in a climate of significantly reduced resources and competition, which adds additional pressure to decisions around what issues and organisations are given priority.

The problem representation does not account for information that already exists which points to many of the underlying issues facing women and girls. There is already significant information available about the negative effects of gender inequality and the ways in which it affects women and girls, as well as proposals for change that can be developed and implemented alongside further research.

Furthermore, without sufficient resourcing it would be difficult to implement any new findings that may emerge through enhanced data or further research.

A focus on more data and particularly quantitative data privileges some forms of knowledge over others. This is particularly noticeable when for example WGOs are recognised as 'experts in the field' on the one hand but are not always listened to on the other. Moreover, they are also funded to provide quantitative research such as social return on investment, to support their existing (mainly qualitative) knowledge based on extensive experience and contact with women and girls who have directly experienced gender inequality.

There is also a focus on data and information as key solutions for individuals. These centre on awareness raising, training and education around gender equality issues. Such an approach does not take account of the role of broader structural issues where there are barriers that extend beyond individual choices. While raising awareness of issues such as violence against women can undoubtedly have positive benefits, it cannot alone address issues of structural inequality.

Turning to capacity-building, the representation does not acknowledge existing specialist skills and knowledge that many women's organisations have through their work over long period of times and with groups of women with particular and specific needs. There is an assumption that those outside of WGOs can provide training to the sector to make it more efficient. The VCS and women's organisations are therefore positioned as those that need to learn and is an approach which is based on a deficit model of communities (Craig 2007). Although the expertise of WGOs is acknowledged elsewhere in the documents, the possibility that the VCS and women's organisations may have specialist knowledge that they can share and that would be valuable to other sectors is not considered in relation to capacity building work.

In a similar way to the discussion above, there is an assumption that with the right capacity building- and capacity building remains a broad catch-all concept that is lacking in specific meaning (Harrow 2001, Cairns et al. 2005) - WGOs will be able to deliver more and better services for women and access the range of funding

options proposed. This neglects to consider to what extent it is the role of WGOs to provide the services, whether those funding options are the most appropriate for the organisations and whether the issue of capacity needs to be considered in relation to resourcing. If organisations had more money for staff resource for example, they would be in a better position to spend time scaling projects, preparing bids, identifying and meeting any training needs or developing the organisation. There is also therefore a need to have the 'capacity' to engage in capacity building.

***What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?***

The effects are that more research, data gathering, and pilot projects are funded, which can absorb time and resources that could be used on implementing actions on issues that are widely recognised such as insufficient service provision and a broad strategy to tackle gender equality. This representation also forecloses wider discussions about what specific capacity issues there may be and the causes of these issues. It generalises about organisations which may be in a variety of positions and in need of differing levels and types of support.

***How and where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?***

This problem representation is widespread across all policy areas that were analysed. Making decisions without any information is clearly not a useful or viable option yet it is also possible to disrupt the reliance on the pursuit of data by questioning whether it is possible to have a 'perfect decision-making environment'. An environment where all of the information is available on a given topic and all of that information is neutral, is also unachievable.

A lack of capacity within both the wider VCS and specifically women's organisations is also problematised across a number of documents and policy areas. It can be disrupted in several ways. It is possible to question the extent to which WGOs need capacity building, why they may need capacity building and for whose purposes, as well as the actual definition of what capacity-building entails? Attention has previously been drawn to these issues in research on the wider VCS, alongside further questions about the implications for maintaining



independence where the capacity-building is part of a broader strategy for the VCS to deliver public services (Cairns et al. 2005).

Questions can be asked about how the 'lack of capacity' may be related to a lack of long-term investment and resources and funding for adequate staff and organisational development. It is also possible to consider what barriers other than capacity, WGOs may be facing, that prevent effective engagement with commissioning processes and whether there are issues with the process rather than the organisations themselves.

Finally, the assumption that building capacity in organisations is an adequate solution for tackling gender equality can also be questioned. The location of gender equality is more pervasive and cannot be tackled alone by WGOs. Capacity-building can obscure existing inequalities through focusing on 'lack of capacity' rather than 'lack of sources of power'. It can also shift the agendas of VCS organisations through encouraging engagement in a process which may divert attention away from WGO goals to instead meet purposes and standards set by government (Craig 2007). Difficulties may be particularly pronounced for small organisations supporting Black and minoritised communities (Netto et al. 2012).

## 7.6 Problem six: The causes of gender inequality are not being addressed

Examples from the documents	Source
"We also recognised that in order to reduce violence against women we had to put concrete plans in place that would identify and eliminate the problem at its root."	Tackling violence against women: a cross-government narrative (Home Office 2008, p16)
<p>"In order to achieve these outcomes, the government has committed itself to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better using its contacts with front-line professionals to identify and intervene with victims of domestic violence earlier.</li> <li>- Building more capacity within the domestic violence sector to give victims of domestic violence more effective advice and support.</li> <li>- Improving the way the criminal justice system responds to cases of domestic violence.</li> </ul>	Tackling violence against women: a cross-government narrative

- Better supporting victims and managing perpetrators through the criminal justice system to reduce risk.”	(Home Office 2008, p17)
“Putting an end to human trafficking has become one of the government’s key priorities for tackling violence against women.”	Tackling violence against women: a cross-government narrative (Home Office 2008, p30)
“In order to start successfully tackling violence against women, the government needed to do more to identify the problem as early as possible; ensure that the right people and agencies were informed; and then ensure that the victim was given comprehensive help and support to put an end to the violence and bring the perpetrator to justice.”	Tackling violence against women: a cross-government narrative (Home Office 2008, p32)
“Violence against women and girls is a gender-based crime... This is the first time that government has agreed to work to a single definition, and we will specifically include girls in our approach.”	Call to end violence against women and girls (Home Office 2010, p5)
“The gendered pattern of violence against women and girls needs to be understood and acknowledged. However, we recognise that men and boys can be victims of violence and that it can affect whole families, including children.”	Call to end violence against women and girls (Home Office 2010, p4)
“Men also have a key role in challenging violence and helping to change the attitudes and actions of their peers.”	Call to end violence against women and girls (2010, p5)
“By allowing women to disclose violence as part of their everyday interactions we can support earlier identification and intervention to stop violence and abuse from escalating to critical levels.”	Violence against women and girls strategy (Home Office 2016, p4)
“We know that these terrible crimes are disproportionately gendered which is why our approach must be framed within a violence against women and girls strategy. However, I recognise that men can also be victims of violence and abuse.”	Violence against women and girls strategy 2016-2020 (Home Office 2016, p6)

“VAWG is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality and we know that exposure to negative gender stereotypes can fuel harmful attitudes towards women which create a fertile environment for VAWG.”	Ending violence against women and girls 2016-2020: strategy refresh (Home Office 2019, p15)
“I am clear that our response needs to recognise and address the gendered nature of these crimes and that our fight for gender equality is a vital component of our work to end VAWG.”	Ending violence against women and girls 2016-2020: strategy refresh (Home Office 2019, p5)
“Our approach to prevention can be characterised in three ways: primary prevention, which is to prevent harm from happening in the first place, secondary prevention to intervene earlier with individuals at risk and to prevent escalation of harm and tertiary prevention to prevent re-offending and re-victimisation”.	Ending violence against women and girls 2016-2020: strategy refresh (Home Office 2019, p15).
“We will work to tackle harmful gender norms, in recognition that all forms of violence against women and girls are both a cause and a consequence of wider gender inequality...with a focus on working with the advertising industry on body image and through working with men and boys to challenge harmful attitudes.”	Transforming the response to domestic abuse (Home Office and Ministry of Justice 2019, p15).
“Too often the word ‘equality’ has been misused and misunderstood because it has come to mean political correctness, social engineering, form filling and box ticking...this strategy sets out a new approach to equalities, moving away from the identity politics of the past and to an approach recognising people’s individuality.”	The equality strategy- building a fairer Britain (Government Equalities Office 2010, p6).

***What is the problem and what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem”? Are there gendered assumptions?***

The problem is that the causes of gender inequality are not being addressed. Within the non-VCS policy documents there are a variety of representations of

the problem of gender equality for those focused on EVAWG. There is an increased and more developed understanding of gender equality which begins to link issues of VAWG with wider inequality issues. In 2008, the **Tackling violence against women: a cross-government narrative** details a series of outcomes to which the government has committed itself, to *reduce* violence against women. The first of four key outcomes starts with front-line professionals identifying and intervening with victims of domestic violence earlier, to tackle the causes of violence against women. Earlier identification of victims, however, occurs once violence has already taken place and is therefore not preventative. The outcomes also aim to *reduce* violence against women, which assumes that violence against women cannot be eliminated, and the goal is limited to reduction of harm.

The solutions suggested focus on providing the individual woman with help and support to end the violence and bring the perpetrator to justice, rather than actions focused on the perpetrator. There is no acknowledgement that there is a wider societal responsibility to end violence against women and girls and bringing the perpetrator to justice is the end goal. Later in the document there is reference to developing a men's agenda, but the associated actions were limited to seminars, a men's coalition and to creating:

“An atmosphere in homes, schools and workplaces where any form of violence against women would no longer be tacitly accepted or worse, condoned.” (Home Office 2008, p34).

In 2010, **The equality strategy – building a fairer Britain** focuses on the term equality as being misused and stipulates a commitment to move away from the identity politics of the past and there is an explicit focus on recognising people's individuality, rather than shared identity or structural inequality.

In the **Call to end violence against women and girls** the United Nations (UN) Declaration (1993) on the elimination of violence against women is used to guide the policy. Reference is also made to the UK ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and importantly, the inclusion of girls as well as women. This can be seen as an important progression from the 2008 policy. The solutions in

this document are placed on prevention work, this time focused on changing attitudes and behaviours as at the core of the strategy.

Within the **Ending violence against women and girls strategy 2016-2020** there is an acknowledgement that issues such as domestic abuse and sexual violence are disproportionately gendered. There is however also recognition that men can be victims of violence and abuse. In addition to the attitudes and behaviours outlined in 2010, there is the addition of 'deep-rooted social norms' (Home Office 2016, p10). The **Ending violence against women and girls strategy refresh** is more unequivocal in understanding VAWG as an issue of gender equality.

***How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?***

An increased acknowledgement of gender equality as a driver of VAWG can be traced through the documents across time. This may be as a result of a number of factors. There has been much greater prominence of the issue of gender-based violence during this period. Certainly, events such as #metoo in 2017 impacted on the strategy refresh and are directly referenced within the documents. Similarly, the adoption of the UN declaration and CEDAW are important international factors that have also influenced national EAWG policy. Furthermore, campaign work by WGOs may also have played a significant role in affecting this increased awareness of EAWG and this is explored further in chapter eight and nine.

***What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be conceptualised differently?***

There are significant silences here as within VCS focused documents there is no discussion of gender or gender equality issues, yet gender has a significant role. As noted by the discussions in chapter three, a reliance on increased voluntary labour is an increase in *women's* voluntary labour and cuts to the public sector services and the funding opportunities for VCS organisation disproportionately affect women. A gender-blind approach to the VCS is therefore problematic for the wider VCS, women and the WGOs that support them.

Gender equality appears as something which is separate from ‘mainstream’ policy documents and as such is not considered within general VCS policymaking. This compounds the invisibility of gender issues, women’s organisations, and their work within the wider VCS government policy framework.

Within the policy documents relating to EVAWG, there is a commitment to identifying and eliminating the problem of VAWG at its root, but the concept of what constitutes a ‘root problem’ is interpreted in specific ways. Despite the increased acknowledgement of gender equality as a key cause and consequence of VAWG, corresponding actions remain limited in the policy documents. They focus on awareness-raising and piecemeal work such as collaborations with the advertising industry to look at the presentation of gender roles, and awareness-raising activities within schools.

Overall, gender equality issues are also individualised. For women offenders, the term ‘vulnerability’ is repeatedly used and is key to the justifications for providing tailored support. There is some attention to why the women who have offended may have become ‘vulnerable’ through incidents of domestic and sexual abuse which are identified as high prevalence within the group. The proposed solutions are focused on providing individual support to women with these issues of ‘vulnerability’ such as drug and alcohol misuse. The gendered nature of violence against women and girls and the role that this plays in creating an environment in which women are subject to gender based violence is not however explored or tackled. The role of WGOs is represented as providing support women to address their individual problems. For example, a solution is to:

“Provide safe accommodation and holistic support for women in the community so that *they* can address the underlying causes of *their* offending (emphasis added).” (Ministry of Justice 2018, p8).

The role of gender stereotypes is also important for understanding how the problem is represented. There is a concern for women to address their offending as they are identified as responsible for intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system. It was noted by Women in Prison that the majority of women who offend are convicted of lesser offences than men yet receive more severe sentences and often their offences may be linked to those caring roles in

the first place. The disadvantage facing women is noted within the Female Offender strategy but without the gendered analysis of why this may be the case. The 'response to the Corston report' also contains little reference to women's organisations despite the Corston report (2007) identifying a key role for specialist services for women.

While commencing with strong assertions about the role of gender inequality in ending VAWG strategies, the proposed solutions centre on piece-meal awareness-raising as the main method of prevention. Acknowledgement of the role of gender norms was an important factor mentioned in several strategies (Home Office 2016 and Home Office 2019) but it is not translated into a significant number of actions and is limited to awareness-raising activities with young people around body image and advertising. The kind of wide scale initiatives that would be needed to address the issue of gender norms which pervade the whole of economic, social, and political life are not proposed.

***What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?***

Overall, there is a failure to take sufficient account of gender inequality or the potential for WGOs to contribute to a gender equality agenda. While individual support and awareness-raising are important services, they are not likely on their own to effect broader gender inequality.

Many years on from the Corston report, women are still not receiving the support system envisaged and as Women in Prison note:

“The women’s prison population remains stubbornly high. The core aim of the Corston report to radically reduce the use of custody for only the few women that pose a danger to others has yet to be achieved” (Women in Prison 2017, p27)

***How and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?***

It is notable that issues of gender and gender equality are absent from the VCS policy documents. Gender equality is conceptualised as an issue for individuals that can be tackled through individual support, awareness-raising and education.

Gender equality is seen as a gendered issue, but not a structural one which needs to be embedded across all policy areas.

The representation can be replaced through recognising the existence of structural barriers and adopting a definition of gender equality that accounts for how the issue is pervasive:

“Something that is present in all domains of reality and that intersects with other complex inequalities, the existence of structural obstacles to gender equality, the need to transform power relations between women and men and the empowerment of women.” (Lombardo et al. 2012, p8).

This would lead to the goal of addressing gender equality across all decision-making so that it is an integrated policy.

### **7.7 Problem seven: The needs of women facing additional disadvantage are not being met**

<b>Examples from the documents</b>	<b>Source</b>
“Thriving communities protect and promote the rights and interests of the vulnerable and disadvantaged in society. This includes those with characteristics that are protected under the Equalities Act 2010. The social sector has long played a vital role in ensuring protection and representation for these groups and strong communities embrace this mission, creating integrated and thriving places for people to live and work together.”	Civil Society Strategy (Cabinet Office 2018, p19)
“The framework Government creates must ensure a plurality of voices and interests and proper processes to manage and reconcile disagreement...this particularly applies to policy that affects BAME communities.”	Levelling up our communities (Kruger 2020, p15)
“The government is aware of the acute problems faced by women with insecure immigration status who suffer domestic violence. We will shortly be announcing details of a new scheme where victims of domestic violence, with indefinite leave to remain in the UK, may qualify for a contribution towards their housing and living costs.”	Tackling violence against women: a cross-government narrative (Home Office 2008, p18)
“The Government recognises that some victims of violence against women, including people with learning disabilities and people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, often face additional barriers to getting the help they need...a guide to civil remedies and criminal sanctions is now available in 10 languages...”	Tackling violence against women: a cross-



	government narrative (Home Office 2008, p35-36)
"We know that practices such as forced marriage where the majority of those affected are women and young girls, 'honour' based violence and female genital mutilation are likely to affect women from specific communities."	Call to end violence against women and girls (Home Office 2011, p9)
"There are particular challenges with the provision of services in rural areas due to the higher costs of delivering them in more remote locations, the dispersed nature of rural communities and the demographic features of the rural population. However, it is important that women and girls in rural areas should have access to the same services as those in towns and cities and are not disadvantaged by a local commissioning process which does not recognise violence against women and girls as an issue."	Call to end violence against women and girls (Home Office 2011, p15)
"We are aware that women who seek asylum in the UK may have experienced gender-specific violence and/or gender specific persecution where there is insufficient protection in their country of origin... Our intention is to ensure that such women and their children are supported while their case for indefinite leave to remain in the UK is developed and considered. We need to ensure that the solution is both financially viable and sustainable."	Call to end violence against women and girls (Home Office 2011, p15-16)
"We recognise that some sectors of society can experience multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage or additional barriers to accessing support. These include women and girls from Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) communities, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender women and disabled women, adults who seek help for childhood abuse and the needs of female offenders who have also been victims of violence and abuse. Our support to promote effective local commissioning will focus on ensuring the needs of all victims are met."	Ending violence against women and girls strategy 2016-2020 (Home Office 2016, p10)
"We know that when LGBT victims access support, LGBT organisations and charities were viewed as the most helpful and there is evidence that LGBT victims face specific barriers when accessing mainstream domestic abuse services."	Ending violence against women and girls 2016-2020: strategy refresh (Home Office 2019, p30)
"The government is also aware of calls from the sector for guidance for commissioners and providers on how to support trans victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence particularly as we consult on proposed changes to the Gender Recognition Act. Through government's stakeholder engagement we have also heard of a need for clear and accessible information for commissioners and service providers on their legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 including how and when to lawfully apply the single and separate sex service exemptions."	Ending violence against women and girls 2016-2020: strategy refresh

	(Home Office 2019, p 31)
"Given the over representation of Black, Asian and Minority ethnic (BAME) women in the CJS we want to see funding used to address the needs of this cohort as well as those of other cohorts of women with protected characteristics who find it difficult to access services"	The Female offender strategy (Ministry of Justice 2018, p13)
"This strategy sets out the Government's new approach to tackling inequality: one that moves away from targeting people as groups or 'equality strands' and instead recognises that we are a nation of 62 million individuals"	The Gender equality strategy (Government Equalities Office 2010, p8)
"We recognise that other protected characteristics, socio-economic disadvantage and/or geographical location can combine with gendered inequalities to create multiple disadvantages. Where we have good evidence of these additional barriers, we have reflected this in corresponding actions however we need to keep building the evidence base to understand how we can go further"	Gender equality at every stage (Government Equalities Office 2019, p3)

***What is the problem and what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem"? Are there gendered assumptions?***

The problem is that the needs of women and girls facing additional disadvantage are not being met and additional measures are needed to support women and girls. This was articulated in many of the documents that were analysed. **The Civil society strategy** focuses on how 'thriving communities' will "protect and promote the rights and interests of the vulnerable and disadvantaged in society" (Cabinet Office 2018). **The Kruger report** however acknowledges that there may be disagreement at community level and that the interests of all may not be accommodated and the government therefore has a role in creating a framework to ensure that there is diversity of representation in policy making.

**Tackling violence against women and girls** recognises the acute problems faced by women with insecure immigration status who suffer domestic violence and includes acknowledgement of the additional barriers facing women with learning disabilities and women from Black and minoritised backgrounds. **Call to end violence against women and girls** has a wider view of disadvantage that includes forced marriage, 'honour' based violence and female genital

mutilation, the provision of services in rural areas and the needs of women who are seeking asylum. The **Female offender strategy** acknowledges the over-representation of women and girls from Black and minoritised background in the criminal justice system. The **Ending violence against women and girls strategy** envisages a key role for local commissioning in ensuring the needs of all victims are met, recognising that some sectors of society can face 'additional barriers to accessing support' (Home Office 2016, p10).

The **Ending violence against women and girls strategy refresh** explicitly acknowledges the importance of LGBT organisations in supporting LGBT survivors of domestic abuse. It specifically highlights the debates about how to support Trans victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence, alongside requests for clarity on legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and when to apply the single and separate sex service exemptions.

***How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?***

This representation has accompanied an increased awareness and attention to the needs of different groups facing additional disadvantages. Issues such as the #charitysnowwhite, #metoo, debates about women only spaces and support for Transwomen, Black Lives Matter and high profile murders of women by men have all raised awareness and heightened support for the need for a more equal and just society. Furthermore, the highly gendered impact of austerity and more recently the COVID-19 crisis have highlighted the persistent inequalities and their impact on the lives of women and girls. This has been particularly pronounced for women and girls with disabilities, women and girls affected by gender based violence, lone parents and Black and minoritised women and girls.

***What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be conceptualised differently?***

There are a number of problems in the representation. The first is the assumption that a thriving community will solve issues of inequality. This has been discussed above in relation to gender equality and localism but is also relevant in relation to women and girls facing additional disadvantages. While it is the case that many organisations in the VCS are committed to ensuring equality, this commitment is not universal. As noted in the literature review

there has been criticism and self-reflection about the role of the VCS in failing to do this (Lingayah et al. 2020, Ubele Initiative 2021). **The levelling up our communities** report does implicitly acknowledge that there is not necessarily a guarantee that communities will operate inclusively and therefore envisages a role for government in mediating for greater equality (Kruger 2020).

Second, the support offered to groups facing additional disadvantages within policies also comes with caveats. **The Tackling violence against women: a cross-government narrative** notes the issues faced by women with insecure immigration status, but support is limited to those who have indefinite leave to remain and who within this group:

“*may* qualify for a *contribution* toward their housing and living cost (emphasis added)” (Home Office 2008, p18).

**The Call to end violence against women and girls** refers to women seeking asylum in the UK and how may have experienced gender-based violence. The offer of support is carefully limited to supporting them while their case:

“is developed and considered. We need to ensure that the solution is both financially viable and sustainable.” (Home Office 2011, p16).

Hence, there are women who may face inequality and be affected by violence but who are only able to access limited and conditional support. Their immigration status is represented as more important than addressing the gender-based violence they have experienced.

Third, it is also possible to note the same issues as raised in other problem representations, where government’s role is to promote local commissioning as a solution. Simply promoting the role of, in this case. local commissioning as a way of securing equality is assumed to be sufficient and lacks exploration of how this will work in practice, what the barriers may be and how this agenda for greater equality can best be supported.

Fourth, **The Female Offender strategy** noted the over representation of Black and minoritised women in the criminal justice system but again no analysis is made of why this may be the case. A call is made for funding to be directed at this group of women and for specialist support services. A request alone is

however, insufficient to take account of the fact that many specialist OBMWG are limited and have decreased in number (Imkaan 2008, 2018). An investment in organisations may also be necessary in order for there to be sufficient capacity to take on additional work and to be able to provide long term and effective support. The call is also not explicit that funding would be for specialist services but just for work with Black and minoritised women. This means that non-specialist organisations would also be able to be commissioned, perpetuating the issue of WGOs experiencing disadvantage in commissioning processes.

Finally, although there is an acknowledgment of the additional barriers that women and girls can face, there is limited discussion of why this may be case and the omission of structural inequality issues is again apparent.

***What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?***

Finding solutions to inequality are largely delegated to local level and the commissioning process. The disadvantages faced by Black and minoritised women and girls although they are referenced, are not central concerns in any of the government policies and for women with insecure immigration status, only conditional and very limited offers of support are available. The effects of this are that the disadvantages are insufficiently considered, not prioritised and therefore also not addressed. The use of non-specialist providers also risks a continued loss of organisations and their associated expertise and experience resulting in further lack of access and disadvantage for Black and minoritised women and girls.

***How and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?***

This problem representation is predominantly located within the non-VCS policy documents, which have a much greater consideration of broader equality issues. The problem representation, while acknowledging that the needs of disadvantaged groups are not being met lacks substance in identifying policy solutions.

It can be disrupted by exploring the ways in which groups are structurally disadvantaged instead of focusing on a nation of “62 million individuals” (Government Equalities Office 2010). It can also be disrupted by questioning why the needs of women who have been impacted by gender-based violence who have insecure immigration status are excluded from the safeguards afforded to other women and why their support is contingent upon meeting additional criteria and perceived financial viability. It is also critical to consider the ways in which disadvantage permeates through all policies and structures and to embed tackling inequality within all decision-making systems, recognising the connections between all types of inequality.

### **7.8 How are WGOs and their work represented in government policy documentation between 2008 and 2020?**

The analysis of government policy documents has highlighted a paucity of references to gender, gender equality and women’s organisations. Documents concerning the wider VCS also fail to acknowledge the diversity of the VCS with a focus primarily on place and service delivery organisations. WGOs are not visible within wider VCS strategies for supporting the sector and are limited to specific policy areas such as gender equality and other gender specific issues. The consideration of WGOs and gender equality issues is therefore isolated from wider VCS policy. Just as Mohan and Wilding argued:

“Policymakers need to move beyond the limited utility of thinking about the voluntary sector and instead target actions towards particular causes or types of organisations that suffer most in periods of economic duress. The sources of such duress - rising levels of need, dependency upon a small number of income streams or donors, poor capitalisation and reserve levels - are not evenly distributed.” (Mohan and Wilding 2009 para.21).

The VCS is also a potentially ever-expanding realm with a wider range of actors outside of government increasingly considered part of civil society. This broadening representation of a wide definition of civil society, alongside a narrowing focus on place, means that WGOs (and other VCS organisations that do not neatly fit this representation) are lost in this wider realm, are not visible and lack inclusion.

The view that gender equality and WGOs are a separate concern has implications for them as organisations, and for wider gender equality issues. This is particularly exacerbated for organisations supporting women facing additional and intersecting disadvantages, where they are also not included in these specific spheres.

As a result, WGOs and their work are not central to policy strategies or resultant resource allocation. Where their role is identified it is in addressing the outcomes and effects of structural inequality, rather than drawing on their knowledge to tackle its root causes. Their expertise is acknowledged in some instances, particularly in their ability to provide one to one tailored support. The representation of their role is however simultaneously limited to this service-delivery role and doesn't take account of their wider purpose, expertise and understanding of how to tackle gender equality more broadly within society as a model which will provide more effective prevention of issues such as VAWG. Instead, there are calls for both more information and data, and capacity-building for the sector.

Where WGOs are discussed as providing support to women with their individual and often complex needs, little attention is given to why the women may have complex needs in the first place and where the root causes for this may lie. This has a range of implications for WGOs including the financial viability of the organisations, limiting their role to supporting women with the end results of gender inequality and impacting on their potential to address wider structural gender equality issues.

Discourse is limited by discussions about money, alternative funding sources and the pursuit of more data and capacity-building. It results in limited conversation about tackling structural inequalities and a resultant lack of large-scale action to address this.

### **7.9 How has this changed between 2008 and 2020?**

For VCS documents, there is a continued pursuit of a localism agenda between 2008 and 2020 and a desire for alternate providers to the central state to provide public services. The analysis identified that there were changes in the definition

of civil society or the 'social sector' which encompassed an increasing number of types of organisation. This has opened up space for justifying more actors to be involved in providing services.

By the end of the period there is recognition that the local commissioning environment has presented real difficulties for WGOs in accessing funding. While the policy is not radically altered there had been a series of 'transition' funding schemes provided to continue provision by WGOs in the short term.

In relation to the EVAWG documents, across the period there is a shift in the way in which VAWG is defined, resulting in more developed understandings of how to tackle the issue. The definition of VAWG begins to encompass language that explicitly links it to gender and one that is linked to broader ways in which women and girls are disadvantaged, including expected gender norms and behaviours. The adoption of a UN definition of VAWG and the ratification of CEDAW are important moments in this shift. This is also the case with responses to the #metoo movement and the development of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. These acknowledgements of EVAWG as a gendered issue however do not extend to explicit recognition of structural gender inequality. Key silences remain on the role of structural inequality as a driver of issues such as EVAWG and the difficulties facing women affected by the criminal justice system.

The representations have paid increased attention to the needs of different groups of women and girls facing additional disadvantages, and over time the documents have recognised and acknowledged different and additional groups of women for whom more specialist support may be needed. This includes for example Black and minoritised women and girls, women and girls with disabilities and LGBTQI communities. This acknowledgement however does not extend to women and girls with insecure immigration status who are not afforded the same level of protection.

## **7.10 Chapter summary**

This chapter has summarised the WPR analysis of government policy documents. It has demonstrated that WGOs are absent from VCS specific policy areas and are represented in specific ways in the others. These specific



representations relate primarily to the role of WGOs in providing individual support for women and girls.

The chapter has also discussed the representation of gender equality and the needs of women and girls facing additional disadvantages, highlighting the limited ways in which the issues are discussed and the lack of acknowledgement for broader structural inequalities. The next chapter considers the third representation in this study - the way in which WGOs represent themselves and their work. The three representations are then discussed together in chapter nine.

## **Chapter eight: How do Women and Girls Organisations (WGOs) represent themselves, their work and the issues that are important to them between 2008 and 2020? How does this change between 2008 and 2020?**

This chapter focuses on the findings from the ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ analysis of documents produced by Women and Girls Organisations (WGOs) between 2008 and 2020. As outlined in the methodology (chapter five) a selection of a minimum of four documents per organisation from across the period from the following organisations were analysed: The Fawcett Society, Imkaan, Women in Prison, Women’s Resource Centre and Women’s Aid. A total of 24 documents were analysed for this part of the study which are listed in appendix three.

This chapter follows the structure of the WPR approach to analyse the documents. It focuses on the problems which were identified for conducting a WPR analysis for each document and then considers them as a whole, identifying both common themes and key differences. An example of the detailed individual document WPR analysis can be found in appendix four.

There are five overarching ‘problems’ that have emerged from the WPR analysis across all of the documents and which are the focus of this chapter. These are:

1. Gender equality is a structural issue.
2. Specialist women-only services are not understood or valued.
3. Lack of appropriate funding of WGOs.
4. Increased demand on services for women and girls.
5. A lack of understanding of the intersection of gender and other inequalities on women facing additional disadvantages.

In the first part of this chapter, each ‘problem’ is presented with examples of text from the documents. The WPR questions are addressed to the problem drawing on the range of documents. The second part of the chapter offers summary conclusions on how WGOs represent their work, the issues that are important to them and how they change between 2008 and 2020. This is offered first at an individual organisation level and then as a collective representation. The aim here

is to answer the question ‘how do WGOs represent their work and the issues that are important to them? And how does this change between 2008 and 2020?’

### 8.1 Problem one: Gender equality is a structural issue

Examples from the documents	Source
“Lack of understanding of the difference between formal and substantive equality continues to be a substantial barrier to the sustainability of the women’s sector...substantive equality recognises that opportunities and access are not equally distributed throughout society and that equality will be achieved by catering to the needs of different groups to address this imbalance. Many public bodies have misinterpreted equalities legislation to mean formal equality and have consequently put pressure on women’s organisations to provide an equal service for men...”	Surviving the crisis: the impact of public spending cuts on women’s organisations (Women’s Resource Centre n.d p6).
“The women we spoke with suggest that key areas of their lives- specifically education and the workplace – have not always provided a level playing field or equal opportunities with men. These structuring effects may also be seen clearly in the domestic sphere, impacting on private relationships and often further constraining the opportunities of women.”	Who has that? Women’s perceptions of equality in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century (The Fawcett Society 2012, p21).
“The JSA (Job Seeker Allowance) regime takes insufficient account of the distinctive circumstances of many women’s lives, in particular their higher risk of getting stuck in low-paid jobs, the impact of their caring responsibilities and the fact that they are much more likely than men to be at risk of domestic and sexual violence.”	Where’s the benefit? (Arris et al. 2015, p79).
“When it comes to an important issue such as the economy, women are often simply excluded from the debate. The insights and opinions of women are less likely to be included in media coverage of this important policy issue...over 80% of those quoted or referenced were men and over 80% of articles were imbalanced in favour of men.”	Where are women’s voices on the economy? (The Fawcett Society 2015, p3).
“Weakness of current political systems such as lack of transparency, accountability and participation in decision-making about the investment of resources in the social sector and civil society.”	The impact of the dual pandemics (Banga and Roy 2020, p4).
“During the two pandemics, violence against women and girls is increased but for Black and minoritised women and girls, racialised discrimination and the disproportionate impact of structural inequalities also become exacerbated.”	The impact of the dual pandemics (Banga and Roy 2020, p3).

<p>“Existing structural inequalities and multiple disadvantages have been highly visible during this crisis. Yet the Government has not published an equality impact assessment for the Coronavirus Act 2020 or other key policies such as the Job Retention Schemes. Conducting and publishing these assessments would reassure the public that the Government is making decisions which take into account the lives of all of our citizens. Acting on them would also make their decision making and policies more effective.”</p>	<p>Exiting lockdown (Fawcett 2020, p3).</p>
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***What is the problem and what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem”? Are there gendered assumptions?***

As the table above demonstrates there is reference to gender equality as a pervasive and structural issue within the reviewed documents. Definitions of what constitutes a structural issue are not explored further but the definition used in this thesis is that structural inequality is found in the way in which society is organised including policies, systems and decision-making processes that inherently disadvantage certain groups, in this case women. The way in which society is organised means that the position of women is inextricably linked to their reproductive and caring roles. At best resulting policies are ‘gender neutral’ and do not take sufficient account of the circumstances and needs of women or their position within society. At worst, they actively reinforce this position. This is in opposition to the government documents discussed in chapter seven. Although they have increasingly used terms such as ‘gendered inequality’, they have also persisted with a non-structural understanding that translates in practice into the individual level problems, responsibility and solutions.

The effect of this is that women are negatively impacted by gender inequality at all levels of their lives and are disadvantaged as a result. Women are not a homogenous group however, and this disadvantage is not felt equally. The intersection of gender with ‘race’, sexuality, gender identity, class and disability means that some women are more adversely affected than others, which is acknowledged in many of the documents that were analysed.

**Where are women’s voices in the economy?** (The Fawcett Society 2015) raises two important concerns related to the lack of women’s involvement specifically in relation to reporting and commentating on the economy. First,

women who are economists are not approached to provide their perspective on economic decision-making and policy perpetuates gender assumptions about appropriate roles for women. Second, policy decisions on the economy have been significantly more detrimental to women yet their views and power to raise these issues are curtailed by their exclusion in media reporting. The report recommends that women should be included in reporting on the economy.

As a whole, while this issue of structural inequality is frequently referenced, it is not generally explored in-depth. Many of the documents do not adequately provide solutions that can tackle these structural issues. For example, in **a growing crisis of unmet need** (Taylor 2013) there is a focus on local authority commissioners and their need to negotiate with WGOs to make the commissioning system work for local women and women's organisations, rather than questioning the commissioning system itself. **Beyond the labels** (Imkaan 2013) is a call to action for support for organisations run by and for Black and minoritised women and girls. While identifying the importance of structural barriers to minoritised women and girls and the organisations that support them, solutions here are also focused primarily on short and medium-term actions to improve access and services for those affected.

Undoubtedly the solutions offered in these documents would bring real immediate benefits to women's organisations and the women they support, because a better understanding of the position, value and needs of the group would be possible. This could potentially lead to more appropriate commissioning processes and decision-making that would alleviate some of the immediate difficulties of the sector. Yet what could also be included is a focus on the role of gender-neutral national government policies of austerity and competition within public services that have created this system of commissioning. Exploring why women's organisations are said to be under-funded and further still why women need these services at all, could also be raised and discussed.

Often documents are directed at an audience of either local or central government policymakers and as such there may be constraints on what it feels possible to propose or request. Ultimately, there may be a desire or need to propose solutions which are felt to be within the realm of what is likely to be

accepted and seen as 'realistic'. More long-term goals or goals that require fundamental restructuring of society may well seem less possible, less likely to gain support and therefore beyond the bounds of what can be suggested.

***How has this representation of the “problem” come about?***

An analysis of power in gendered relations is a necessary part of understanding and meeting the needs of women. This underpins the work that specialist women's organisations do, how they respond to gender inequality issues and how they meet women's needs. An emphasis on structural inequality in the way in which they represent themselves and their work is therefore integral to many WGOs. This is particularly the case for WGOs originating from the second or third wave of feminism onwards which were informed by a gendered analysis of power relations. This resulted in an important shift to see the 'personal is political' in recognition of the way in which the lives of women and girls and the disadvantages they face on a personal level are a result of broader political structures in society.

***What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the “problem” be conceptualized differently?***

It is important to identify spaces where the root causes of inequality can be raised, explicitly defined and solutions can be actively identified. Without this the structural issues will remain only noted and abstract but will not be addressed. Furthermore, while gender inequality is raised as a context for discussion, more ambitious or radical solutions are frequently missing from the documents.

There is likely to be diversity of opinion across WGOs about the causes and nature of gender equality. Not all WGOs take a progressive approach to gender, but that has been the focus of the analysis presented here. Hence the dominant representation is one with an understanding of gender equality as a structural issue.

***What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the “problem”?***

This representation of the problem emphasises that gender inequality is a structural issue and that this should be the starting point for any proposed

solutions and clearly in contrast with many of the government documents where it is rarely discussed. This has the effect of keeping this discourse ‘alive’.

If there is not space within the documents to push the limits or boundaries of what can be suggested or proposed as solutions, however, there is a risk of continuing with short term solutions. This is admittedly difficult when even the short-term solutions proposed are not fully implemented and progress is slow and piecemeal.

***How and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?***

This representation is consistent across the WGOs and a wide variety of documents. There is a narrow emphasis on raising awareness about the need for urgent funding for organisations who are at risk of closure or who have already closed, increased demand on services and for seeking recognition for their work. An alternative would be to continue to emphasise the need for longer term solutions of gender equality that are not focused on individuals, and that instead of reducing funding to organisations, working to end gender equality would bring greater benefits and a reduction in the need for services.

**8.2 Problem two: Specialist women only services are not understood or valued.**

<b>Data</b>	<b>Source</b>
“Women’s organisations have traditionally found it challenging to find sustainable long- term funding, due to widespread misconceptions about the causes and consequences of women’s inequality. For example, the Donkey Sanctuary receives more donations than the combined incomes of the largest violence against women and girls’ organisations in the UK.”	Surviving the crisis (Women’s Resource Centre n.d., p6).
“Women’s voluntary and community organisations act as local unsung heroines”.	Surviving the crisis (Women’s Resource Centre n., p4).
“91% of women and girls spoke about the value and benefit of being directly supported by a specialist women-only service”.	Beyond the labels (Imkaan 2013, p10).

“Many women who access women’s organisations’ services will not access mainstream services whether provided by other voluntary organisations or statutory institutions”	Life changing and life-saving funding for the women’s sector (Women’s Resource Centre 2018, p7).
“The UK Government has made steps towards lifting the coronavirus lockdown, signalling a move to the next phase of the national response to the pandemic...But with women making up a small minority of those involved in decision-making, gendered perspectives are being missed. This does not just risk inequalities - it means that the likelihood of us ending the lockdown successfully will be undermined”.	Exiting lockdown, the impact on women (The Fawcett Society 2020, p3).

***What is the problem and what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem”? Are there gendered assumptions?***

A number of documents articulate the important role of women-only service provision (Women’s Resource Centre 2007, Taylor 2013, Imkaan 2008). In particular, they report that there is a need for women only spaces where women and particularly those who have been affected by issues such as violence can feel safe to access support. They also emphasise that being provided with support from a women’s organisation is of particular importance because of the knowledge and experience within specialist organisations supporting women. In addition, these organisations offer support in ways that acknowledge the role of gender inequality, centre women’s experiences and offer longer term support and confidence-building.

The documents detail how this critical aspect of the work of WGOs is not widely understood, acknowledged or valued and identify that this has a range of implications for those organisations. This includes: first, a lack of prioritisation for women-only services; second, funding which does not always allow them to work in the ways that their experience has shown are most effective, such as longer term, needs-led and therapeutic support; third, pressure to provide services to men as well as women; and fourth, reference to a women’s sector. Each are explained further below.



First, a lack of prioritisation for women-only services. **Beyond the labels** (Imkaan 2013) emphasises that support provided by specialist organisations in a women-only environment is fundamental to offering effective services for women, particularly women from Black and minoritised backgrounds. They explain that some women may need support to recognise their experience as abuse and training is also needed for professionals to recognise and support women and girls who are affected. Imkaan stress that support provision needs to be accessible locally to be effective and access to counselling and therapeutic support is essential, yet this is currently difficult to access and not funded as a priority. **Capital losses** (Imkaan 2016) highlights that specialist services for Black and minoritised women have a long history and record of providing services which gives them an authority based on this experience. This argument is extended in **Survival to sustainability** (Imkaan 2018) which centres on the unique position of ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG) organisations for Black and minoritised women. These organisations are able to appropriately support women and but moreover the organisations for Black and Minoritised Women and Girls (OBMWG) are also change makers, not just service providers. As such they are positioned to be able to bring opportunities and support for longer -term change.

Women's organisations are also described as being at a greater disadvantage than other more general VCS organisations.

“Previous research has found that women's organisations are generally small or medium sized, with fewer sources of income than other types of service charities.” (Women's Resource Centre n.d., p6).

Similar arguments are echoed across organisations, across documents and across time as WGOs continually explain the services they provide and justify why they are needed (for example, Women's Resource Centre 2018, Imkaan 2013 and 2016, Davidge 2019). This would suggest that WGOs do not feel understood or valued.

In the representations of their work and their organisations, several distinctions are drawn between themselves and other organisations. In explaining who they are and what they provide, they also seek to explain also what they are not and

by extension therefore how other organisations may differ from them. This creates a series of oppositions in the documents. For example, in **A growing crisis of unmet need (Women's Aid 2013)** oppositions are established between the women's sector and local government commissioners, and between specialist women's organisations and generic providers/charities where specialist WGOs are positioned as offering high quality, independent, longer-term and needs led support, which is often locally based. This contrasts with what is seen to be generic, quick-turnaround provision from staff without the specialist experience in large organisations such as housing associations. For example, **'SOS save refugees save lives'** (Women's Aid 2014) clearly states that support should be focused on specialist domestic abuse organisations that have women at the heart of their work (and are not for profit). The importance of local and specialist compared to national and generic services is also used to contrast women's organisations with larger 'mainstream' services, as seen in **Life-changing and life-saving funding for the women's sector** (Women's Resource Centre 2018):

"Many women who access women's organisations' services will not access *mainstream* services whether provided by other voluntary organisations or statutory institutions (emphasis added)." (2018, p7).

There is a lack of definition or examples of 'mainstream', however, and the assumption is therefore that it might include any service (statutory or VCS) which is not provided by a women's organisation. The supporting statement to evidence this uses the example that only 10 per cent of survivors of rape and sexual abuse who access rape crisis centres report their experiences to the police. In this instance, the reporting of rape to the police is conflated with access to any service (VCS or statutory). There are likely to be women who would only access women's organisations, but this is not explained or justified further, and which women for whom this may particularly apply, is underexplored.

It is also stated that women will access generic women's organisations and then move to EAWG organisations to seek specialist support where they may have been affected by VAWG. Women however may also access any general VCS organisations that are not women's organisations with which they have a positive

relationship, and then seek specialist support from a women's organisation. It does not necessarily always follow that they will stay within WGOs.

**Surviving the crisis (Women's Resource Centre, n.d.)** includes the argument that women's organisations are distinct from a wider women's voluntary and community sector and that they are at a greater disadvantage than this wider sector. This is sometimes used in the service of distinguishing by and for women's organisations from other organisations such as housing associations, who may be providing a service to women but who are not led by women. However, there are no discussions of the limits or difficulties of this. When does a 'by and for' women's organisation cease to be a 'by and for' women's organisation and what are the limits or criteria for this categorisation? This echoes the difficulties raised by the categorisation work for the quantitative chapter in chapters five and six.

Similarly, **Government Transforming the response to domestic abuse: supporting female offenders' section** (Women in Prison, 2018) recommends that strategic funding is needed for women's centres to support women who have offended. They advocate for specialist services for women in contact with the criminal justice system as generic domestic abuse services are not enough to support this group. This raises another layer of specialism within the women's organisation sector where organisations are positioned as more or less specialist in relation to the wider VCS.

In relation to the third implication for WGOs (the difference between women and men seeking support), a distinction is also made between the needs of women seeking support who often require the specialist women-only provision of WGOs and those of men who may have different needs and circumstances. **'Hearing women's voices'** (Women's Resource Centre 2018) discusses the problem that women's organisations are increasingly under pressure from commissioners to deliver services to men. It is argued that the needs of women cannot be met effectively in mixed spaces, that women need to feel safe due to the impact of male violence and that all women's organisations are welcoming and non-judgemental to all women. Qualitative research confirms the need for women only spaces and that these are highly valued by the women who attend (Women's Resource Centre 2007, 2018) as spaces where women can be 'safe from harm

and safe to engage' (Lewis et al. 2015) . It is also known that women from Black and minoritised backgrounds have valued specialist support run 'by and for' them (Mama 1996, Sudbury 1998, Roy and Ravi 2012) and that access to women's organisations on a geographical basis is very uneven, with some women unable to access appropriate support (Domestic Abuse Commissioner 2022). This is particularly the case for women who may face additional barriers and who need specialist support such as women with disabilities (Jacobs 2020, Women's Resource Centre 2020).

In the fourth implication, WGOs identify as a very specific set of organisations with their own history. There are few instances where women's organisations describe themselves as part of a wider VCS and alliances and links are more clearly referenced to other WGOs and a women's sector.

***How has this representation of the “problem” come about?***

Many of the documents have been produced in response to a call from central government or in response to a policy document. It is important therefore to see the documents in the context of a perceived opportunity to influence policy, for example, a call for submissions to an inquiry by a parliamentary select committee.

There may also be an imperative to highlight a women's and girls' sector as distinct from a wider VCS both in response to its unique history, development and focus but also due to a lack of inclusion of WGOs within government policy. The perceived lack of awareness, visibility and recognition of women's organisations means that there is a need for the organisations to raise the profile of their work, an understanding of the value of their work and the impact that they have on the lives of the women and girls that they support.

Additionally, there is an emphasis on the need for women specific services and for services that are bespoke to the requirements of groups facing additional barriers or disadvantages such as women who have been affected by the criminal justice system, women affected by violence or women with insecure immigration status.

***What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the “problem” be conceptualized differently?***

It is clear and is reinforced in the literature review that women’s organisations have a unique history and development that would support the emphasis on their distinction from a wider VCS. However, it is similarly the case that other VCS organisations can attest to having unique histories of their own, which reminds us that the VCS is an extremely diverse grouping. There are many factions, groupings and alliances within the broader VCS who could also see themselves as distinct.

***What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the “problem”?***

A strategy to represent WGOs as an expert voice and assert the unique role and experience that they have is clearly evident, in order to attract the recognition and resources needed to carry out their work. Indeed, many such as Women’s Aid have been providing services for women affected by domestic abuse for over 45 years and have a huge body of knowledge and experience. However, some of the division and opposition between different groups also brings the risk of creating competition. This competition may not always be necessary or productive and could create barriers to developing alliances and broader shared goals. It can also risk the women’s sector being left out of wider VCS policy and strategy or other VCS initiatives because it is seen as a different sector or area of work.

***How and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?***

Variations of this representation have been included in almost all of the WGO documents. A strategy built on seeking recognition and value for their work is important in an environment of increased competition, but it can be disrupted by reflecting on the extent to which the space allocated to reinforcing a distinct and unique identity dominates discussions about the organisations and therefore limits the space to discuss other issues such as opportunities to articulate gender as a unifying theme and disadvantage that is relevant in all areas of policy rather than just within the specialist WGO sector.

### 8.3 Problem three: Lack of appropriate funding of WGOs

Data	Source
"The violence against women sector has a history of chronic structural underfunding that is unusual even in the voluntary sector. The services have never been "contracted out" from the statutory sector. They have grown up in a highly challenging, even hostile environment, led by women who have been determined to meet a need whose very existence has often been disputed every step of the way. Full cost recovery has been unknown in this sector."	A growing crisis of unmet need (Taylor 2013, p3).
"Commissioning and funding cuts drastically reduced the amount of funding available for local specialist services."	Life changing and life-saving funding for the women's sector (Women's Resource Centre 2018b, p13).
"In the past, women's organisations' incomes were made up of a combination of public donations and grants from charitable trusts and from local public bodies, including local councils and health authorities. However, the past decade has seen a clear shift in how voluntary and community organisation are funded by their local public bodies, from needs-led grants to commissioning, which focuses on outcomes and efficiency of service delivery."	Surviving the crisis (Women's Resource Centre n.d, p6).
"Before COVID-19, the specialist Black and minoritised refuge sector experienced decommissioning at disproportionate levels. In 2018, 25 Black and minoritised women's refuges shared an income of £10 million (or an annual turnover of £400,000 on average). Ten generic refuges shared an income of £25 million (or an annual turnover of £2.5 million on average) (Imkaan, 2018). The generic organisation was awarded 6 times more funding than the specialist Black and minoritised women's organisation on average."	The impact of the dual pandemics: Violence against women & girls and COVID-19 on Black and minoritised women and girls (Banga and Roy 2020, p5).

#### ***What is the problem and what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem"?***

WGOs all raise the issue of the lack of funding for their organisations. Furthermore, WGOs highlight that this lack of funding means that costs to society and the state are felt more acutely in the need for services such as policing, courts and other public services. They report that this under-funding is historical and has worsened under austerity measures and has increased the pressure on services.

**Surviving the crisis** (Women's Resource Centre n.d.) proposes solutions focused on including women's organisations within commissioning processes and for women's organisations to lobby, create partnerships with other women's organisations and try to engage with commissioners at the start of the process. This is echoed in **A growing crisis of unmet need** (Women's Aid 2013) where a loss of WGOs and consequently a loss of expertise and adequate support for women is identified. This increases the risks to the lives of women and girls who have been affected by violence. Women's Aid also draw attention to services that have been replaced with less effective alternatives as well as the cost implications for statutory services in doing so. Similarly, **SOS save refugees save lives** (Women's Aid 2014) states that support for women and girls should not be emergency, generic and one off but longer term and bespoke. This is again repeated in **Funding specialist support for domestic abuse survivors** (Davidge 2019) which outlines the lack of sustainable funding and support for specialist domestic abuse support sector organisations.

When specialist services are not funded sustainably, it is argued that the costs are displaced to other public services. Specialist organisations supporting women from marginalized groups will require additional investment. It is also suggested that a drive toward gender-neutral and one size fits all models have also caused a funding crisis for women's organisations, where elements of the service such as provision for children and community-based support services have been cut. Overall, these problems have led to a lack of funding to organisations for women.

Within the documents there is no direct identification of where responsibility for these decisions lies, and how the situation has been able to develop to create these additional barriers. For example, the language used states that "this funding reduced significantly", but it is not made clear how the funding has reduced significantly and who was responsible. This limits the scope to consider how to identify the problem most appropriately, and its potential solution. Again, there may be limits on what it is possible to say in relation to identifying government policy as responsible and the implications for this when WGOs are also seeking increased funding for their work. The asymmetrical power relationship between WGOs and government can limit the opportunity to criticise

one of the main funders of their work and it is possible that this may effectively result in self-censorship of what organisations feel able to say and how far they can criticise government policy. This may be heightened in a climate where organisations that have criticised government policy have been subject to calls for investigation by the Charity Commission. For example, the Runnymede Trust was investigated after concerns were raised about the charity's compliance with rules on charities and political activity. (The Charity Commission 2021).

Similar concerns are reflected in **A response to the justice select committee inquiry into the Government's Transforming Rehabilitation Programme** (Women in Prison 2017) which states that the voluntary sector requires significant investment in order to be able to provide the services needed. They question the role of the WGOs as working with individual women to undertake a 'needs assessment' and signposting to services, services which often do not exist or have limited resource, instead of a more holistic approach and comprehensive provision of services. At organisation level, the complex bureaucratic systems, lack of clarity of roles and communication and transfer of financial risk have put a serious strain on organisations and the staff and volunteers within them. The competitive nature of the process has also impacted on partnerships and created competition instead of collaboration.

The documents all raise very important issues about the scale of problems facing WGOs, a lack of funding, huge demand for services and limited inclusion of the sector in planning and decision-making. However, explicit identification of the problem, and suggesting more challenging and radical solutions and recommendations could be needed to reflect the scale of the issues raised. If these organisations who are key to mobilising engagement with policy, and lobbying for change are depleted, there will be substantial gaps in driving forward a gender equality agenda.

Requests for funding are framed in different ways. **SOS save refugees save lives** (Women's Aid 2014) uses the language of women as vulnerable and in need of safety, support and services, through the imagery of 'SOS' and lifesaving. There is a risk here that the language reinforces gender stereotypes of women as in need of 'rescue'. There could also be a case to demand that services are



respected and valued rather than simply 'saved', but clearly there is an emotive link to an emergency state of affairs that makes this imagery powerful.

**Hidden value** (Women's Resource Centre 2011) takes a different approach by seeking to demonstrate the social return on investment for women's organisations. It aims to answer the question of the value of women's organisations in monetary terms. There are unquestioned assumptions about all women's organisations being of equal value and quality, since variations in scope and service provision are not discussed. Women's organisations are described in homogenous terms, with both positive and negative uses. For example suggesting that all women's organisations are always women centred and unique in supporting women and that all women's organisations are ill-equipped to compete in a commissioning environment and are at a greater disadvantage than the rest of the VCS.

There is also an assumption that not demonstrating value has been a reason why women's organisations have not historically secured sufficient funding particularly within commissioning frameworks, and that therefore a SROI analysis will be effective in addressing this issue.

### ***How has this representation of the "problem" come about?***

The documents appear to have largely been produced in response to key challenges presented by the context of 2008 to 2020 where a variety of crisis situations have impacted on women's organisations. As discussed in the literature review the impact of austerity measures and the COVID-19 crisis on women and women's organisations has been significant.

In particular the difficulties accessing funding, increased competition for resources and rising demand for services may have led to this increased emphasis on defending and promoting the value of WGOs' work. The reports are also an opportunity to lobby for more resources. A number of documents are in response to calls for responses to help shape policy and therefore provide an important space to argue for the need for further investment in WGOs.

WGOs such as Women's Aid (Taylor 2013) articulate historical under-funding for the work that they do. This was also demonstrated in the literature review in chapter three where there have been insufficient resources to provide services such as refuges for all the women and girls that need them. The issue of under-funding is therefore longstanding.

***What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the "problem" be conceptualized differently?***

Organisations wrote the documents in the context of a perceived emergency and therefore immediate needs are obviously most prevalent. The possibility that women's organisations have been historically without sufficient funds is perhaps underplayed. This reported under-investment has meant that the organisations have been particularly vulnerable to change and crisis situations, but why women's organisations have been able to be under-funded is not addressed. Potential solutions such as increasing the number of women involved in political decision-making and increasing accountability for policies that negatively impact on women, are not fully explored.

In relation to SROI calculations, there are also silences around why saving the government money should be a central consideration, particularly in the delivery of life-saving services. The sums of funding spent on essential services for women through women's organisations are already very small compared to the cost of issues such as domestic abuse to society (Walby 2004). Will a demonstration of the monetary value of women's organisations lead to increased funding or are there other issues that cause the underinvestment such as a lack of interest and prioritisation of services for women? The value of the service to the women and children supported is also far beyond that of monetary value alone.

It is beneficial to look at specific types of women's organisation rather than all women's organisations, as they are not all positioned equally in terms of access to resources or the issues that they are seeking to address. If some women's organisations are at a greater disadvantage, then solutions need to be wider than a SROI analysis intended to cover all organisations. However, producing this kind of work is also labour- and cost-intensive and not therefore easily conducted by

organisations who are under financial pressure and who are also delivering services.

Repeated requests for specific ring-fenced funding and long-term support have been made throughout the documents, with different emphases and justifications and across time. That these have received limited responses has been discussed in both the quantitative analysis and the analysis of government policy. Asking for funding has not led to significant improvements in the situation of all organisations and therefore it would be valuable to look at what other alternatives or strategies can be mobilised to support them.

***What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the “problem”?***

The focus is on requesting funding for essential services and justifying their value and existence. As a result, the conversation becomes locked into how funding can be secured for the survival of the organisations and the critical services they provide. It reinforces the sense of having to ask or request support rather than it being taken as given, and part of a wider more fundamental problem of gender inequality which is a damaging and pervasive issue across all of society. It also results in women and the organisations that support them as being positioned as ‘in need’ and lacking power which can reinforce gender stereotypes but also potentially does not recognise key strengths within the sector.

***How and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?***

A lack of funding is undoubtedly a serious concern for WGOs, and a broad range of strategies are used to emphasise this issue as discussed above. It can be disrupted by reflecting on strategies that focus on inherently gendered images, such as discourses of rescue and vulnerability. Alternative strategies could be based on the right of women to be safeguarded and to access services while ever issues of VAWG remain, justified on the basis that structural gender equality is a root cause of the problem.

Furthermore, as noted in the literature review the lack of funding for WGOs is not a ‘new issue’ although some of the specific challenges related to commissioning are. There has been a persistent lack of investment in services for women particularly for lifesaving provision such as refuges and this is linked to broader questions about who is responsible for ensuring services are accessible and well-funded to do their important work.

Challenging the notion of ‘creating value’ is also important here. There is an assumption that a purpose of WGOs is to create and justify value. However, the purpose of many of the WGOs is not the generation of value but one of meeting the needs of defined beneficiaries.

#### **8.4 Problem four: Increased demand for services**

<b>Data</b>	<b>Source</b>
“Many policy changes such as legal aid and welfare reforms are still being introduced but are already affecting women who are turning to women’s organisations for support.”	Surviving the crisis (Women’s Resource Centre n.d, p8).
“In one ‘census’ day in 2013, 155 women and their 103 children were turned away from refuge because of lack of suitable space.”	SOS save refuges save lives (Women’s Aid 2014, p4).
“Women reported that the abuse they experienced got worse during the pandemic. This finding was especially true for those women living with their abuser. Of this group, 61.3% (19 out of 31) reported worsening abuse.”	A perfect storm (Davidge, 2020, p7).

#### ***What is the problem and what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem”?***

From early in the period under study, women’s organisations have been raising the issue of the disproportionate impact of austerity measures on women (The Fawcett Society 2012). This has meant an increased need among women for the services of WGOs. It also coincides with public sector cuts that have affected voluntary sector funding and the increased contracting of services instead of grants which has created greater levels of competition and barriers to accessing funding for many women’s organisations.

Moving into 2020, **A perfect storm: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on domestic abuse survivors and the services supporting them** (Davidge 2020) reviews the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic abuse survivors and identifies a wide range of issues including a worsening of domestic abuse and routes of escape, funding challenges and adapting to new ways of working. **The impact of the dual pandemics** (Banga and Roy 2020) describes the same difficulties but also outlines severe additional issues faced by specialist 'by and for' Black and minoritised women's organisations. The organisations face existing issues of under-funding coupled with a situation they describe as a 'dual pandemic' of increased VAWG and the COVID-19 virus. The Women's Resource Centre in **The crisis of Covid-19 and UK women's charities'** (Women's Resource Centre 2020) also reiterates that insecure funding for less well-resourced organisations led by Black and minoritised women is of particular urgency. They also highlight that the COVID-19 crisis has increased isolation from services and exacerbated mental health issues and that there has been a need to adapt service provision to meet these demands. In addition, there are particular increased difficulties for disabled women in accessing care and facing isolation. Alongside calls for secure and long-term funding, the Women's Resource Centre is also calling for intersectional equality impact assessments on all government COVID-19 related policies.

***What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the "problem" be conceptualized differently?***

The problem of increased demand is an important part of the call for recognising the work of the organisations and the need for increased service provision. There is undoubtedly evidence that demand cannot be met and that it has increased particularly following #metoo and the COVID-19 crisis. Serious concern has been expressed that the reductions in services following from cuts to budgets will lead to an increase in the amount of violence against women and girls (Towers and Walby 2012). It is assumed in the documents that VAWG and other gender inequality issues facing women will continue in to the medium and long term as there is a lack of action for addressing the root causes of these harms.

***How has this representation of the “problem” come about?***

The documents have also been produced in response to key challenges presented by the context of the 2008 to 2020 period where a variety of crisis situations have impacted on women’s organisations. As discussed in the literature review the impact of austerity measures and the COVID-19 crisis on women and women’s organisations has been significant and has provided the context in which these documents have been produced.

As stated in relation to other problem representations, many of the documents have been produced in response to calls from government, or opportunities to have influence that have been created by shifts in the social or political environment. WGOs therefore may be responding to these opportunities as a space to raise awareness, lobby for resources and campaign for change.

***What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the “problem”?***

The problem of increased demand on services focuses on the role of austerity, the COVID-19 crisis and increased societal awareness of VAWG. While these have exacerbated inequality and created a greater reported level of demand on services, there are underlying issues of funding to the sector that pre-date these crises.

This has the effect of focusing on the ‘unusual or special’ circumstances rather than the potentially ongoing and historical lack of resources for WGOs and their work. It also forecloses discussion about whose role it is to provide the services and ignores the history of WGOs where women mobilised to create and provide specialist provision such as refuges.

***How and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?***

The demands on services have been a particular issue for the EVAWG organisations and for the members of the Women’s Resource Centre. It can be disrupted by questioning how the need for services can best be reduced so that rather than continuing to fund more provision, it is possible to prevent VAWG.

## 8.5 Problem five: A lack of understanding of the intersection of gender and other inequalities on women facing additional disadvantages

Data	Source
“The lack of disaggregated data to fully identify the scope and scale of the problem invisibilises the racial, gendered and intersectional impact of the crisis. Where the invisibilisation continues, Black and minoritised women will fail to be recognised in responses by government to address the crisis deepening the sense of systemic discrimination and exclusion that occurs from the existing situation of inequality.”	‘The impact of the dual pandemics’ (Imkaan, 2020, p4)
“In the longer-term, it is envisaged that the adverse impacts COVID-19 crisis will have a greater intensity and severity for Black and minoritized women and girls.”	The crisis of Covid-19 and UK women’s charities’ (Women’s Resource Centre 2020, p4)
“Some women and girls questioned whether not being heard was more connected to broader racist attitudes by some professionals and less about the limitations around language.”	Beyond the labels (Imkaan 2013, p18)
“For a test, track and trace approach to be fully effective, households without recourse to public funds due to migration status will also need to be able to access state support, through the lifting of this condition in England and the creation of temporary Limited Leave to Remain.”	Exiting lockdown (The Fawcett Society 2020, p3)
“Some groups of women appear to be being sanctioned without good reason more often than other groups. Lone parents, 92% of whom are women, are significantly more likely than other claimants to be successful when they appeal against a sanction, suggesting that they are more likely to have been sanctioned unreasonably in the first place. There is anecdotal evidence of women who have difficulties with English being sanctioned repeatedly simply because they do not understand what the system requires of them.”	Where’s the benefit? (Arris et al. 2015, p11)
“Without a home, it is that much harder to care for children, get a job or training placement, register with a GP and access health care or arrange benefits.”	Home truths (Women in Prison 2016, p3)

***What is the problem and what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem”?***

A recurrent problem emphasised within the documents examined is that of the intersection of gender with other disadvantages such as disability, ethnic background, low income, women who have been affected by the criminal justice system or VAWG and women or people who identify as LGBTQI or non-binary. These difficulties are extended to the specialist organisations supporting women with these characteristics and also for more generic women’s organisations in extending their services to provide tailored support. For example, **Surviving the crisis** (Women’s Resource Centre n.d.) outlines that there are particular difficulties for specialist organisations by and for Black and minoritised women and girls, LGBTQI and disability focused groups.

The problem is that while the needs of women as a whole are not sufficiently taken into consideration, this is even more the case for women facing additional disadvantage. **Beyond the labels** (Imkaan 2013), **Capital losses** (Imkaan 2016) and **Survival to sustainability** (Imkaan 2018) all discuss the need for specialist OBMWG that can take account of the role of structural inequality where issues such as language, racism and immigration status can place additional barriers to accessing support. **Survival to sustainability** (Imkaan 2018) in particular, outlines the broader context in which EVAWG organisations for Black and minoritised women and girls operate where the continued questioned presence of minority communities in the UK impacts on the environment in which Black and minoritised women, girls and children are subject to violence, but also on their ability to access safety, justice and autonomy.

Furthermore, Imkaan also highlight how government responses to issues such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage can be used to justify increased surveillance of Black and minoritised communities and cause further barriers to accessing support for Black and minoritised women and girls. Within existing funding models, disadvantage is built in, with commissioning practices favouring larger organisations who can invest significant resource in the bid process, leading to unequal partnerships between larger organisations and specialist organisations. The specific role and nature of the work of OBMWG is not considered in the criteria where additional services such as outreach and



language support are integral to the provision but are additional costs. The system therefore creates structural disadvantage for these groups in accessing funding. The inclusion of this structural analysis differs from previous publications by Imkaan which do not outline the importance of this broader structural inequality framework in such detail.

This examination of the specific needs of Black and minoritised women and girls and indeed other groups of women facing additional disadvantage is not present in all documents. It is possible to see an increased awareness and commitment to raising these issues by organisations which are not specifically just for OBMWG. For example, in **A growing crisis of unmet need** (Women's Aid 2013) it is acknowledged that OBMWG have faced greater cuts in funding but there is no further analysis of why this is the case and how they can be best supported. There is no reflection on which women and how well women from a variety of backgrounds and experiences are supported. In **A perfect storm: the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on domestic abuse survivor's and the services supporting them** (Davidge 2020) there is an acknowledgement of the particular intersectional disadvantage of women from Black and minoritised backgrounds and those who are deaf or disabled. Reference is also made to research materials from other specialist organisations such as Imkaan and Sisters of Frida.

A group that are frequently missed in documents by women's organisations that are not specifically supporting them, are women who have been affected by the criminal justice system. Women in Prison emphasise the complex disadvantages often faced by this group including previous abuse, mental ill-health and drug/alcohol misuse and a lack of access to housing (Women in Prison 2016). However, there is not a detailed discussion of the underlying issues beyond an acknowledgement of the additional difficulties caused by poverty, a lack of appropriate and affordable housing and their caring role.

**A response to the justice select committee: Prison population 2022: planning for the future inquiry** (Women in Prison 2017b) and **HM Government Transforming the response to domestic abuse: supporting female offenders' section** (Women in Prison 2018) identify the importance of community support provision as the answer to tackling the issues facing women

who have offended. They highlight the need for community-based holistic support and housing options to support women, arguing that women's centres and domestic abuse organisations are best placed to do this work and funding should be diverted away from new prison buildings and used to fund community provision.

In relation to housing provision, there are assumptions that the much wider housing crisis can be overcome to provide increased specialist single sex accommodation and a more integrated and supportive multi-agency approach to addressing need. The question of pressures on local housing and local authorities particularly during austerity cuts and why this chronic housing shortage exists is not explored.

***How has this representation of the “problem” come about?***

The women's organisations that have been part of this analysis are those which are frequently working with and supporting women who face significant and additional disadvantages. They are therefore positioned to be acutely aware of the difficulties that inequality causes for the women and for their organisation. They are also organisations which have a strong history of campaigning for women, as detailed above, and, in this way, they can be strong advocates for disadvantaged women. An increased awareness and commitment to supporting specialist organisations can also be seen in the growing prevalence of calls for support for OBMWG, for services for deaf and disabled women and for people who identify as LGBTQI.

***What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the “problem” be conceptualized differently?***

There is more work that can be done to support women and girls facing additional disadvantages, to focus on their needs and fund the organisations working to provide them with important services. For example, in **Where are women's voices on the economy?** (The Fawcett Society 2015) 'women' are presented as a homogenous group. There is no analysis of 'which women' may be more likely to be economists or more likely to be consulted on the rare occasions that this occurs and consequently there is a lack of reflection on other intersecting

disadvantages rather than just 'women' as a single category. There is a risk that the voices and experiences of disadvantaged women will be excluded.

***What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the “problem”?***

This representation is important in raising awareness of the complex range of issues facing women and girls that are affected by a range of disadvantages and the organisations that support them. Explicitly including and acknowledging the needs of organisations working with women and girls facing additional disadvantage also has the potential to help raise awareness and seek support for the organisations.

There are also areas where there could be greater inclusion of women and girls facing additional disadvantages embedded within all aspects of the work. While acknowledgement is an important step in recognising the limited resourcing within key parts of the sector, there could be space for more discussion, co-work and directing of resources to support women and girls facing additional disadvantages and the organisations that support them.

***How and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?***

Frequently the documents are aimed at central government policymakers. While documents may be shared between organisations, and there are references to other women's organisations, within these documents there is less evidence of joint campaigning and strategies to move forward a gender equality agenda (although this is present elsewhere, see for example the End Violence Against Women and Girls Coalition 2023).

It should be possible to think about and discuss ways in which structural issues can be specifically addressed, acknowledging the long-term nature and commitment required to do this. If this is not surfaced, and particularly by WGOs, it is difficult to identify who or where else this will happen. As Weldon and Htun noted, WGOs are essential and more fundamental to change than:

“The presence of women legislators, the impact of political parties, or national wealth. Autonomous feminist organising ensures that words become deeds.” (Weldon and Htun 2013, p245-246).

This can be taken forward by examining where there are sources of dispersed power than can be mobilised to support change. This could be from within the range of WGOs themselves, across WGOs and with a wider range of actors that includes but is not limited to central government. While government is certainly a key force, other factors such as media, private businesses, funding organisations and institutions are also important authorities to be persuaded and communicated with, along with allies within wider civil society. Taken further, these are not just issues for women. How are the insights promoted more widely with other women who are not currently directly involved in women’s organisations and where can discussions with men and those who may not identify as women take place?

## **8.6 How do WGOs represent themselves, their work and the issues that are important to them between 2008 and 2020? How does this change between 2008 and 2020?**

Drawing on the WPR analysis above, this chapter concludes by addressing directly the question of how WGOs represent themselves, their work and the issues that are important to them. This is discussed first at an individual organisation level and then as a collective representation.

### **8.6.1 An organisation level view**

**Imkaan** presents the case of a sector facing real and significant challenges, both long-term structural inequality and the challenges exacerbated by austerity, an increase in VAWG and the COVID-19 crisis. They also highlight the loss of organisations providing specialist services from a sector which was already small. They describe important lived effects as there is a vital loss of support to women and lives may be at greater risk as a result. This is particularly important as women supported by the organisations face intersecting inequality issues of race, gender and often class.

Calls for ringfenced and longer-term funding are repeatedly made across the time frame. There is a focus on trying to secure survival and then sustainability but

this leaves little or no resource for securing conversations and demands to address VAWG as a whole and to explore bigger longer term and further upstream solutions.

For Imkaan earlier documents had much less of an emphasis on the context of structural inequality than within later documents. This change and adaptation may show increased willingness to raise more fundamental structural inequality issues, may be as a result of greater opportunities to do so, be because of shifts in political and social environment or a combination of factors. Importantly, they have the potential to encourage others to follow suit, thus creating a space where increased challenge can be made by a variety of voices.

Throughout the period, there are also repeated calls in each of the documents from Women's Aid for further funding and support to women's organisations who are providing life-saving services. There is a shift from a 2008 document which provides an overview of the provision of Women's Aid organisations but with no recommendations for action through to a 2014 document which outlines a strong call for help for refugees at risk. This was followed by further calls for funding support in 2019. In 2020, the situation became more acute as the COVID-19 crisis impacted both on organisations and the individuals affected by domestic abuse and further support and funding was being sought to minimise the impact of the crises. Documents from early in the period included few references to intersecting equality issues but in later documents this has become a much more prominent feature.

The Women's Resource Centre published **Hidden value** in 2011 focused on the financial value of women's organisations, while **surviving the crisis** (n.d.) was raising the alarm about a sector in need of support. **Hearing women's voices** (2018a) demonstrated the value and potential of women's organisations and in 2018 there is a return to calling for ring-fenced and long term funding. In 2020 the combined issues of the COVID-19 crisis and the continued funding crisis for organisations led to **the crisis of COVID-19** publication. There has also been increased inclusion and highlighting of the needs of OBMWG.

There are a number of recurrent themes through the Women in Prison documents. Primarily, that there are women in prison who should not be there and for whom the outcomes for them, their families and wider society are made worse by their imprisonment. They also propose that community-based solutions and support which tackle the underlying causes for the offending would be more effective. They argue that the lives of women who offend are made more difficult by the multitude of barriers that they face and that these barriers make re-offending more likely. These barriers include loss of housing, difficulties accessing employment, difficulties in their role as caring for children and the fact that many women have mental health needs, experiences of abuse and trauma and require appropriate support.

As an organisation that supports women who have offended, Women in Prison have experienced barriers to their ability to carry out their work. Initiatives such as the Transforming Rehabilitation Programme, for example, have caused issues with trying to retain independence and difficulties accessing the level of funds needed to run the services to support women effectively.

The Fawcett Society documents are frequently focused on improvements to political representation for women, as well as improvements for women in work and those in receipt of benefits within the context of campaigning for greater gender equality. Over time, they have responded to the crises and have highlighted the gendered dimension and disadvantages for women from austerity and the COVID-19 crisis, alongside their continued work on political representation for women and women's employment.

### **8.6.2 A collective representation**

The ways in which WGOs discuss their work and the issues that are important to them include common themes of pervasive gender inequality, a lack of being valued and being under-funded to do their work. The common thread of gender inequality and its structural nature is woven through the documents highlighting the many ways in which this has an impact on the organisations themselves and the women and girls they support.

As a collective group of documents and organisations, WGOs have sought to represent themselves as a specialist group of organisations providing vital services that have historically been overlooked. Work has been undertaken to develop a strong sense of identity as WGOs and there is a strong commonality of identifying a specific position with the wider VCS for women's organisations. A distinction is made between women's organisations and other VCS organisations, recognising their own history and identity grounded (in the case of many of the organisations studied here) in second wave feminism of the 1960s onwards. Interestingly at times there are also distinctions drawn *between* women's organisations so that differences are highlighted between 'by and for' women's organisations and other women's organisations. Reinforcing this strong identity may also be linked to efforts to gain recognition and value for the work of 'by and for' women's organisations as discussed above but there is a danger of creating division between like-minded organisations who may also have similar goals.

There is a strong association with EVAWG and there are few references to wider understandings of WGOs for example social organisations, women's health organisations, and general women's centres. The Fawcett Society documents were more focused on individual women and legal changes for increased equality at work, in the welfare system and childcare.

WGOs have emphasised the importance of retaining a focus on structural inequality as a root cause of issues facing the women they support. However, during a period of intense difficulty, they have focused on seeking funding to continue their work and raising awareness about the WGOs that have been at risk or which have ceased to exist. Over time there has been more attention to intersectionality, and OBMWG have more explicitly stated the additional barriers they face.

WGOs make repeated appeals for better levels of funding and funding arrangements for WGOs. They perceived low levels of recognition of the importance of the sector, low levels of funding and commissioning systems that did not take account of the type of work that the experience of women's organisations tells them is important. They used a number of strategies to make the case for the value of investing in women's organisations. They have drawn

on research that has demonstrated the value of women centred work by women for women, both in terms of monetary, societal and individual levels. These range from evidence of need for services and the inability to meet demand, particularly when it is increasing, through to economic models of justification such as Social Return on Investment (SROI) and appeals to the life-saving nature of the work that many organisations carry out.

While some larger organisations can more easily collate evidence of increased demand for services, there will be many instances where calculating need is a much more difficult task. For smaller organisations with fewer resources and less sophisticated systems in place to monitor demand and for situations where women are facing multiple complex issues, calculating the demand is more difficult. In addition, it is extremely difficult to identify the numbers of women who do not come forward for support because they are unaware of what is available, particularly when there is limited capacity for organisations to promote their work and a lack of resources for outreach provision. Economic models such as SROI provide one way of calculating value but are less adept in providing an indication of the importance of improving the quality of lives. Appeals to the life-saving nature of work carried out by refuges is emotive and effective but relies on the use of gendered stereotypes of women as in need of 'rescue' and an emphasis on their 'vulnerability' which is also not without its difficulties.

Women's organisations articulate being in a difficult position. They appear to be fighting the corner for themselves as organisations to survive and provide good quality long term services, while also for women in general, raising issues of structural inequality and for specific groups of women facing additional disadvantages. Simultaneously, they are focused on solving very practical important and immediate issues because of emergency and crisis situations, and campaigning for long-term change. This work is carried out in a context where gender inequality does not appear to be a central policy issue and there are few women in positions of power to champion their work.

## **8.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter has reported the WPR analysis of WGO documents. It has demonstrated that WGOs represent themselves as a group of specialist



organisations with a strong identity and key role in supporting women and girls, particularly those who face additional and intersecting disadvantages. WGOs have throughout this time focused attention on raising the alarm about policy changes which have had a particularly adverse effect on them and the women and girls they support. The chapter has also discussed the representation of gender equality by WGOs as a structural inequality but noted that the space and resources to explore adequate solutions is limited both discursively and in time and resources by the austerity and neo-liberal agenda.

## **Chapter nine: Discussion - three representations of WGOs 2008 to 2020. What are the implications of these representations for gender equality?**

### **9.1 Introduction**

This study has addressed the following research questions.

1. Who are the WGOs registered as charities in England and Wales between 2008 and 2018<sup>15</sup> and how are they represented in quantitative regulatory data?
2. How are WGOs and their work represented in Government policy between 2008 and 2020?
3. How do WGOs represent themselves, their work and the issues that are important to them between 2008 and 2020?
4. How do each of the above representations (questions 1,2,3) change over the time period?
5. What are the implications of these representations for gender equality?

Chapters six to eight discussed three different representations of WGOs and how these changed across the period. This chapter explores how the three different representations can be placed “in conversation with one another” (Hesse-Biber 2010, p67) to think about the ways in which they express and discuss WGOs and their work, and in so doing reflect on a more complex story. This is done using the four core themes outlined in the theoretical framework chapter (chapter four) to bring together and reflect on the different perspectives provided by the representations. It begins with 1) visibility, followed by 2) power, then 3) difference and intersectionality. The chapter concludes with the final theme and research question, 4) what are the implications for gender equality?

### **9.2 Visibility**

The issue of visibility in relation to WGOs has been recurrent within the different elements of this study. Here, visibility is discussed in three ways; 1) the

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<sup>15</sup> Due to limitations of the regulatory data the quantitative analysis focuses on 2008 to 2018. This is explained further in chapter five.

identification and categorisation of WGOs that are registered charities 2) visibility for WGOs and their work and 3) the visibility of the issue of gender inequality.

### **9.2.1 Identifying and classifying WGOs**

The intention has been to investigate the ways in which WGOs can be and are represented. Initially, this included the identification of WGOs through the Charity Commission dataset to be able to draw together a picture of what a landscape of WGOs may contain. Below four parts of the process are discussed to highlight the key considerations and issues that arose as part of this process of identification or 'making visible'. These are, i) key exclusions; ii) creating a category of WGOs; iii) analysis of the WGO dataset; and iv) visibility and the state.

#### **i) Key exclusions**

It is worth noting again that the nature of this study means that it excludes several organisational forms that may be part of a women's sector including informal organisations, women's groups within larger organisations that serve more than just women, campaign alliances that are not registered charities, those organisations using other legal forms such as Community Interest Companies (CICs). Specifically, in overlooking informal and smaller organisations or projects/services embedded within larger organisations, the representation may also be creating a bias toward larger groups and more well-resourced organisations. There will also be projects for women located within and existing with varying degrees of autonomy from organisations that serve multiple needs of a community. As such, the study cannot be said to represent a 'complete' account of WGOs.

The Charity Commission, however, provides the most comprehensive set of data available which acts as a starting point from which further work can be developed. New datasets such as 360 giving<sup>16</sup> can provide additional insight into the range of WGOs to supplement the data (Damm et al. 2023), as can data provided by WGOs themselves and increasingly through government sources such as the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office. This will increase the scope of

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<sup>16</sup> [www.grantnav.threesixtygiving.org](http://www.grantnav.threesixtygiving.org)

organisations that can be included but as outlined in both the methodology (chapter five) and the quantitative findings chapter (chapter six), there is an inescapable issue with visibility where ‘making visible’ is a process laden with political choices, and the partial view that is always presented in classification work, where some things are made visible while others are not.

## **ii) Creating a category of WGOs**

A ‘women’s sector’ is something which is referred to by some key women’s organisations such as the Women’s Resource Centre in the documents reviewed (2018, 2023). However, as noted in the methodology there is no clear definition of what a women’s sector is or who it contains apart from a broad notion of ‘by and for’ women’s organisations. Creating, naming and analysing this dataset has constructed a *representation* of a potential sector of WGOs that may or may not be widely agreed upon. Now created, this dataset is available for further analysis and research and may have a performative effect on how the sector is defined, measured and counted with the potential for a range of consequences for WGOs as outlined in chapters five and six.

The representation provided in chapter six gives a wide view of women’s organisations that encompasses three different concepts: organisations that are predominantly 1) run by women, 2) by and for women and 3) organisations where the beneficiaries are women, but where they are not run by just women. Encompassing so many organisations that are not just ‘by and for’ women may dilute what some see as a WGO sector. For example, in analysing documents from the Women’s Resource Centre there was a strong identification of women’s organisations as ‘by and for’ organisations working to a set of common values, implicitly excluding WGOs benefitting but not run by women (Women’s Resource Centre 2007). Imkaan also state the importance of ‘by and for’ Organisations for Black and Minoritised Women and Girls (OBMWG) (Imkaan 2015).

Applying such a strict criterion of ‘by and for’ to the dataset was not possible as the level of detailed information required to do this is not available. The Charity Commission does not, for example, identify charity trustees by gender; if it did, an agreed proportion of when an organisation is ‘by’ women would also then need to be found. In addition, finding a method to judge the extent to which an

organisation is 'for women' would rely on an understanding of when an organisation can be 'for women' in a number of different ways, such as exclusively, predominantly, or by use of a threshold fixed percentage of women beneficiaries. The Women's Resource Centre included the importance of a 'common set of values' in its definition. These are not outlined but identifying as a 'feminist organisation' is one possible set of values that could be applied. There may be unifying features (as outlined in chapter four) but there are also likely to be a spectrum of positions, since it is known that there are a broad range of 'feminisms' that exist (Humm 1992).

As has also been stated in chapter five the way in which organisations have been identified in this study is not the only way that this categorisation could have been conducted. There are many overlaps and 'fuzzy' edges as organisations do not neatly fit within one space or another (Macmillan 2013). The interpretation of where an organisation fits within this study may not necessarily coincide with that of another researcher or indeed that of the organisation, or the women and girls they support.

A wide view of WGOs also highlights organisations that may not have previously been included such as those providing funding to individual women. It therefore also brings the possibility for greater acknowledgement of those organisations and the potential to explore collaboration between types. This wide view can also highlight instances where there may be discord or competing approaches from organisations for women, where some may be more or less open to all women. Others may have more or less of a commitment to gender equality issues. How WGOs are defined and categorised therefore has implications for what is given visibility as a WGO and the representation of a WGO sector.

### **iii) Analysis of the WGO dataset**

Once the group of WGOs was identified, further decisions impacted on the representation. For example, focusing on the numbers of organisations, level of annual income or another measure of size such as membership all produce very different pictures of the sector and illuminate different sources of perceived strength, weakness, or difference as well as who has (in)visibility.

Sub-categories were used within the analysis to highlight the diversity of women's organisations and their work. The categories that were selected draw attention to organisations by grouping them as a particular 'sub-type' and therefore help to make visible the diversity within the group. Creating sub-types and adding a further layer of classification also assists us with exploring the data at a more granular level to reflect on the detail of which types of WGOs are increasing or decreasing in number, experiencing changes in income level, and how they are distributed geographically. It allows an intersectional analysis where multiple dimensions can be explored simultaneously so that it is possible to identify organisations working with more specific groups such as ending violence against women and girls' (EVAWG) organisations for Black and minoritised women and girls. Through this detailed analysis it is possible to be more specific about which organisations are experiencing changes, in what ways and how this may reflect broader societal inequalities which may not otherwise be so visible.

The quantitative analysis at sub-sector level has made visible a wide grouping of WGOs working in different thematic areas. There are significant numbers of organisations beyond those supporting women affected by the Criminal Justice System, EVAWG or in women's centres. As above, the sub-types are also not without limitation and do not escape the issues detailed at the broader level of identifying a women's organisation. For example, an organisation focused on sport for disabled women could be classified as either sport or an organisation for women with a disability, or both. Those within the group may themselves have a strong preference for how they are categorised which may be one, none or all of the above. The intersectional analysis does not entirely escape the criticism that it is still a generalisation.

The heterogeneity of OBMWG should also be noted and while the sub-category combines organisations from across the different identified subcategories, there are also important differences between them. In terms of the women they support, some organisations may be for women and girls from specific backgrounds such as Asian women and girls or Black and minoritised women and girls with a specific health condition or disability. These differences are not visible when they are categorised together in to one group. Similarly, organisations may be grouped together who do not share common values or goals. For example, different

organisations supporting sex workers may have different goals, values or ways of working but are located within the same sub-category.

#### **iv) Visibility and the state**

Trying to draw boundaries around a WGO sector raises questions about how and whether it is possible to represent a sector in ways which give visibility but do not enhance control, despite the intention to use it for positive purposes. As Lather stated, it is possible that there is a contribution to “dominance in spite of our liberatory intentions” (Lather 1991, p15). Nickel and Eikenberry also highlight that this increased visibility to government includes an increased risk of control as “it enables the efficiency of surveillance” (Nickel and Eikenberry 2016, p401) and “potentially disciplines the qualitative dimensions of democratic associational life and misrepresents the possibilities of social change” (Nickel and Eikenberry 2016, p392).

Increased visibility can be problematic if it leads to greater inclusion in government agendas. It has the potential to lead to incorporation into government strategy and direction and consequently the potential for a loss of independence and the ability to work toward more radical gender equality goals beyond those that align with the current dominant state view. These issues of visibility therefore also feed into wider debates about the VCS’ independence from and relationship to the state (Milbourne and Cushman 2015; Egdell and Dutton 2017).

Certainly not all WGOs enter into direct relationships with, or make themselves visible to, the state. There are WGOs who do not have direct links to the state particularly smaller social based organisations with very low incomes. For some WGOs, particularly those delivering specialist services in less prosperous communities, it is unclear if it would be possible to remain completely invisible and removed due to their reliance on state support. Furthermore, currently WGOs occupy a space where they are neither invisible nor entirely visible, registered with the Charity Commission they are individually identifiable but as a group they have not been easily identifiable in data sources.

It is also important to recognise that increased visibility has been advocated by WGOs themselves. WGOs have experience of working with the state, many of

whom as organisations have been campaigning since the first wave (the Fawcett Society) or second wave of feminism (Women's Aid). They are frequently aware of where state and WGO agendas are not compatible and have raised this as an issue. For example, in 'A response to the justice select committee inquiry into the Government's Transforming Rehabilitation Programme' Women in Prison articulated conflicts in values between the voluntary nature of participation in women's organisations and the role of women being mandated to attend services as part of their probation (Women in Prison 2017).

The mapping work undertaken in this study to represent quantitatively WGOs who are registered with the Charity Commission may be inappropriately used to suggest that as there have been investments in some areas that these therefore no longer need further funding. It could also be used to suggest that decreasing numbers of organisations means that an organisation is no longer as relevant or needed or used to compare different types of organisations and create increased competition for resources. Discourse of any type whether quantitative or qualitative may also be misinterpreted and used in ways in which it was not intended. Appe (2012) points to different kinds of mapping agencies. Identified in her typology (Type 5) are civil society organisations creating their own maps: "to increase public legitimacy and foster self-regulation regimes" but also in response to "non-profit organizations feeling threatened by government regulation" (Appe 2012, p207-209). Mapping can therefore be seen as a response to control as well as a method of control.

One way forward, which has been pursued here, is that the identification and categorisation process can be seen as a 'strategic' choice, where the limitations and contradictions may be exposed, acknowledged, and accepted in pursuit of a broader goal. In this study the aim has been to provide transparency about how the information has been created, the limitations of its utility and for it to be contextualised. It is also critical to reflect on how WGOs may be able to have greater access to the data to support their work as an important part of the feminist commitment to 'challenge power' and 'embrace pluralism' (D'iganzio and Klein 2020). Nevertheless, it should be accepted that how the information is finally utilised and by whom may also be beyond the control of the producers, regardless of its original purpose.



### **9.2.2 Visibility for WGOs and their work**

WGOs do not have a high level of visibility in VCS research. This study has highlighted that this lack of visibility may in part be related to the lack of a category for WGOs within the International Classification for Non-profit organisations (ICNPO), within Charity Commission datasets and other datasets such as the UK Civil Society Almanac. More fundamentally however, there has been a lack of interest in WGO research (Vacchelli and Kathrecha 2013) and research that embeds gender as a tool of analysis has also not been a strong feature of VCS research (Dodge et al. 2022).

The quantitative analysis in this study has enabled for the first time, a view of the breadth of work that organisations predominantly working with women and girls are carrying out and the range of organisations involved in this work in the UK. In this way, the quantitative representation has been useful to increase the visibility of WGOs. Creating this representation from a feminist perspective means that efforts have been made to provide clarity on the limitations and nuance of the construction while also recognising that it has the potential to be a valuable resource for contributing toward gender equality goals, evidencing changes to the nature, income, location, and size of different organisations.

WGOs also lack visibility to government (beyond specific policy areas such as VAWG). The analysis of government policy documents demonstrates that while WGOs working specifically in EVAWG are given recognition for their work in relevant policy documents, they are not as visible within wider government policy on the VCS. WGOs are also not significantly represented in other specific areas where WGOs can and do have considerable impact.

The recognition of the role of women's organisations within EVAWG work is demonstrated across the period but has become more pronounced and wide ranging in recent government documents as demonstrated in chapter eight. The Ending violence against women and girls 2016-2020: strategy refresh document (2019) acknowledges a wider range of WGOs including specialist organisations supporting women and girls from Black and minoritised backgrounds and organisations supporting women and girls with disabilities and LGBT women. Such a shift suggests an increased awareness and involvement of a broader

range of EVAWG organisations, which may be as a result of a number of factors such as #metoo, broader social changes as well as campaign and engagement work by WGOs.

The Female offender strategy (2018) uses more ambiguous language which is non-committal to WGOs and their work. The use of the term “gender-informed providers” in the strategy does not display an exclusive commitment to WGOs as key providers. Organisations which are not WGOs could also meet ‘gender-informed’ criteria depending on how this is defined. It therefore leaves open the possibility of using alternative providers (which may be necessary in some instances, if for example there may be a lack of geographical coverage) but also has the effect of making WGOs less visible as a key provider of support to women and girls and may indicate a lack of acknowledgement of the value of WGOs.

Government uses language such as ‘recognise’ throughout different EVAWG documents to indicate that they are noticing either WGOs themselves or issues facing women and girls. This may indicate a degree of acknowledgment that a particular issue or type of organisation has been noticed and suggests that it has gained prominence within the policy direction, but it is not always linked to specific actions to address the need. For example, local commissioning was recognised as being problematic for WGOs (Home Office and Ministry of Justice 2019) and as such led to the release of further funding for WGOs, but this was with the caveat that it was to be transitional while the original goal of local funding for EVAWG organisations continues to be pursued.

Given the lack of consistent inclusion of WGOs and coherence within the analysed government policy documents, it is perhaps unsurprising that the analysis of WGO documents uncovered a strong feeling of a lack of understanding and value of their work. The sentiment was evident across the different organisations and across time. The reported lack of visibility and sense of value for their work means that the documents are used to justify and raise awareness about their work and the benefits to the individual women and wider society. This was largely directed toward government and potentially other funders. It was apparent in a strong commitment to evidencing a sector or grouping of WGOs with a distinct identity (Macmillan 2013), differing from the

wider VCS, and repeated explanations of the nature and value of their work supporting women and girls. These issues of identity, visibility and recognition are clearly linked.

In creating and reinforcing a strong identity as a sector, some WGOs actively create a representation of themselves as a discrete group. This may suggest a similar 'strategic unity' (Alcock 2010) to the wider VCS. However, in the case of WGOs, the unity may not be entirely strategic but may also be due to the shared history and goals of many of the organisations (whether first, second or other wave organisations) and therefore building on a pre-existing shared connection.

Macmillan refers to the importance of 'distinction' in the wider voluntary sector as an extension of Alcock's concept of a 'strategic unity' (Alcock 2010) through highlighting the presence of 'fractions and fragments' within the sector, (Macmillan 2013). Distinction is of particular relevance here, as in the analysis of WGO documents it is possible to see links between reinforcing identity as a strategy for both visibility and recognition but also as a strategy to secure resources. This is demonstrated through reinforcing the benefits and value of their own organisations using discourse such as "a specialist women-only service" (Imkaan 2013, p10) and through differentiation between themselves and other organisations such as:

"Many women who access women's organisations' services will not access mainstream services whether provided by other voluntary organisations or statutory institutions" (Women's Resource Centre 2018, p7).

In this way they distinguish between what are seen as 'legitimate' members of a 'by and for' sector and those that may not be. Extending this further, the inclusion of an organisation may have consequences for being seen to be part of a particular sub-sector and therefore afford legitimacy to requests for resources accessible to that sub-sector or to influence strategies for that group. By its nature this work is also exclusionary.

If an organisation is seen as excluded from the sector, it may make claims to resources or attempts to influence strategy seen as illegitimate or undeserved. On the other hand, exclusion from the group could also provide opportunities to

access resources and influence from other sources where members of that particular sub-group may be excluded. For example, EVAWG organisations can access ‘specialist’ funds from specific government initiatives and therefore they may not be seen as candidates for general VCS funding.

Analysis has identified that some WGOs within the sector may not necessarily be progressive, may not support efforts to address gender inequality, may not be run for the benefit of all women and may in some instances be averse to gender equality. Examples could include organisations such as moral welfare organisations, historical charities with very specific beneficiaries and organisations that do not support access to services such as abortion. Defining a ‘by and for’ sector may be a legitimate way to exclude many of these organisations from a group focused specifically on gender equality goals. A focus on being ‘by and for’ may therefore be part of a strategy for reflecting the shared values of a particular group, and a political commitment to women being involved in the decision-making of the organisation. In this way, organisations that may not be led by women and may not reflect this commitment can be excluded from the sub-group of organisations.

There has clearly been progress in increased levels of recognition of an EVAWG sector, particularly when compared to the paucity of acknowledgement of WGOs within the other policy documents. It is less clear that there is an identity for the whole sector. When examples of a women’ sector are used by government they are usually in relation to EVAWG organisations or women’s centres, as seen in this extract from a 2018 document:

“The women’s voluntary and community sector is dedicated to its role in protecting women and girls from violence and to the provision of adequate and consistent services to help victims.” (Call to end violence against women and girls 2010, p18).

WGOs allocate a lot of space to reinforcing a shared identity because of a presumed lack of recognition and inclusion. Hirst and Rinne cited a lack of ‘political clout’ from the sector, with concerns from a range of actors about the lack of a champion for WGOs and the need for:

“Central government to give clear messages about the need for and value of women’s services” (2012, p77).

Reinforcing the identity, visibility and recognition of WGOs becomes increasingly important in times of lessened resources and cuts. Creating this strong identity may still be deemed necessary due to the precarious ongoing funding situation coupled with the need to ensure that the immediate needs of women who require support are met with appropriate gender specialist service provision. Yet with so much focus on visibility, identity and value it can be argued that there are limits on the space to discuss the broader needs of women and girls and addressing gender equality. This study reinforces Ishkanian (2014) argument that space and energy for raising wider inequality issues have become limited.

The quantitative analysis demonstrated that there were instances where some areas of WGO work have had an increased income, and while an analysis of the sources of income was beyond the scope of this study, it is notable that these areas related broadly to those identified in the policy documents – anti-trafficking, women affected by the criminal justice system and EVAWG organisations. This would suggest an increased investment from government is likely to be part of the increased income for those WGOs.

It is possible that WGOs have made important progress, particularly EVAWG organisations. They may now be able to shift some of the discourse to encompass broader gender equality goals. However, the quantitative analysis highlighted the particularly difficult circumstances facing organisations for Black and minoritised women and girls (OBMWG), where the numbers of organisations and the income levels have been in decline across the period. There has been an increase in seeking recognition for specialist services for women and girls facing additional disadvantages as noted in the analysis of WGO documents (chapter eight) and in more recent government documents (chapter seven) but the quantitative data up to 2018 suggests that this has not translated into significant additional income across OBMWG.

Visibility is of course, not just to government. There are other significant funders of WGO work, and there are other organisations new or established with whom

connections and alliances can be made. Visibility to wider society for the organisations, their work and about gender equality is also critically important. The #metoo movement, the murders of Sarah Everard<sup>17</sup> and Sabina Nessar<sup>18</sup> and many other women and girls have raised support for and the profile of WGOs. However, the increased visibility also brings negative attention from men who are a risk to women. The gendered nature of social media abuse has been a feature of more recent years<sup>19</sup> (Mantilla 2015) and the increases in misogyny (Fazackerley 2023) and Incel groups (Dodd 2023) are particularly concerning.

To summarise, the theme of visibility for exploring the representation of WGOs is a useful way to consider the ways in which WGOs are engaged in seeking increased recognition for their organisation and their work. Visibility is tied to creating an identity and defining the nature and boundaries of WGOs. It can be seen as part of a strategy to seek increased recognition, value and resources and also to raise awareness about wider gender equality issues (discussed further below). It also has the possibility for negative effects, where increased visibility creates the possibility for greater 'surveillance' and unwanted attention from a number of sources.

### **9.2.3 The visibility of gender equality**

The visibility of gender equality itself as an issue is an important part of this study. The quantitative analysis has shown that there has been an increase in the number of gender equality organisations suggesting a trend of greater societal interest in or awareness of the issue. There has also been an increased number of gender equality organisations specifically for Black and minoritised women and girls. Income for gender equality organisations has also increased substantially.

Within government documents that are aimed at the wider VCS, there is little consideration of gender and gender equality. There were frequent references to the voluntary sector and volunteering but without acknowledgement of the gendered nature of the sector and its profile of employment and volunteering. As noted by Levitas (2012) and Pearson (2019) in chapter three, policies such as

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-56331948>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-58675196>

<sup>19</sup> <https://theconversation.com/analysis-shows-horrific-extent-of-abuse-sent-to-women-mps-via-twitter-126166>

austerity measures and the Big Society have been conceived in gender neutral terms that mask the realities of who they will affect the most and who it is that is being asked to take on more responsibility. This study has shown that this was also evident in further VCS policies such as the Civil Society Strategy (Cabinet Office 2018) and the Levelling up our communities report (Kruger 2020). Discussions of the backdrop of policies of austerity and significant cuts to services are very limited within the documents. While there are occasional references to being in a 'different economic climate', the systematic shift to continue reducing the state is not explicit in the discourse.

There is no specific mention of WGOs as part of the wider sector in government VCS policy (although other groups within the VCS are also not discussed) and as has been noted previously the sector is largely conceived in terms of place-based organisations. In the pursuit of localism and shifts to service providers from outside the state, there is little acknowledgement of the issues that may arise from shifting to VCS and community provision. Communities have vastly different experiences, access to resources and power dynamics that may help or hinder efforts to address community need. This is particularly problematic when communities are being signalled as a site for solving inequality issues.

As noted in the WPR analysis chapters (chapters seven and eight), both WGOs and government include reference to 'gender inequality' and a need to tackle the 'root causes' but there are key differences in the ways in which these terms are used suggesting differing understanding and approaches to its resolution. In all instances from 2010 onwards the focus for government is on individualised behaviour change, education, training, and awareness-raising strategies. For WGOs the issue of gender inequality is *structural*, that goes beyond individual behaviour change, as indicated here:

"The women we spoke with suggest that key areas of their lives- specifically education and the workplace – have not always provided a level playing field or equal opportunities with men. These structuring effects may also be seen clearly in the domestic sphere, impacting on private relationships and often further constraining the opportunities of women" (The Fawcett Society 2012, p21).

It is also an issue which should not be separated from other structural inequalities:

“During the two pandemics, violence against women and girls is increased but for Black and minoritised women and girls, racialised discrimination and the disproportionate impact of structural inequalities also become exacerbated” (Imkaan 2020, p3).

As discussed above, WGO documents are frequently focused on seeking commitments to adequately fund the services they provide. There is little space and visibility therefore for longer-term strategies which include asking questions about whether it is desirable that VCS organisations should be providing fundamental services such as refuges through piecemeal support and whose role it is to ensure that these services are funded, accessible and comprehensive. Importantly there is also limited space for addressing gender inequality itself as a structural issue and its intersection with other inequalities.

### **9.3 Power**

As outlined in chapter four a post-structural understanding of power focused on discursive and dispersed power as a positive and negative force enables a more nuanced view of the differing relationships between WGO organisations and sources of power.

#### **9.3.1 Discursive power**

This section discusses discursive power in relation to each of the three representations in turn, followed by a summary. i) The quantitative representations; ii) The representation in government documents; iii) The representation in WGO documents and iv) summary of discursive power in the three representations

##### **i) The quantitative representation**

Categorisation and labelling have the discursive power to create boundaries, with consequences for those who are included or excluded. When identifying and classifying it was important to recognise the power of selecting which organisations to include or exclude, and the fact that these decisions may be more or less conscious and subject to bias.



Creating a WGO grouping may also reinforce binaries of gender, and acknowledgement is needed of the limitations of this approach. There are issues of understanding the term 'women' that can be obscured by issues of gender identification. As noted in the theoretical framework chapter (chapter four) a focus on organisations for women should also recognise and take account of the lack of a fixed definition of 'women' as a category. In this study, organisations that encompass wider notions of gender are included, but this is not reflected in the language of the group as '*Women and girls* organisations'. We know that language is constitutive (Lather 1991) and creates both openings and barriers.

This raises the question of whether 'women and girls organisations' is the most appropriate term to use? Removing women from the name, however, is also problematic. Women are still far more likely to be affected by violence in the home and sexual abuse and exploitation. Most women also recognise and identify with the term, and thus there is a sense of recognition for women in the very term itself. Knowing that an organisation is seemingly for women, and seems to say so, is important for identifying and accessing services. These are important and recurrent debates within the WGO sector and its work. Recent debates about women only spaces were discussed in the literature review in chapter three. It was also demonstrated in the shift toward more 'women plus' organisations in chapter six and was noted as an issue in chapters six and seven. A shift in language away from the use of 'women' may conceal this important signifier of gender inequality. However, as discussions within fourth wave feminism remind us, it is also the case that there is very significant inequality and disadvantage for those who do not adhere to binary notions of gender, are gender fluid or are transgender. A commitment to centring 'gender' inequality could address the full range of disadvantage that gender confers. In this way it becomes possible to move away from an either/or situation where, on the one hand, a focus on women cannot include those who do not identify as women or, on the other, the inclusion of a wider notion of gender does not dilute the needs of women. Feminism is rooted in tackling disadvantage and the lessons of historical division and exclusion within the movement have shown that alliances and support for those facing disadvantage in all of its forms is critical to move forward with agendas to address inequality (Mackay 2015, Ahmed 2016).

Discursive power is also demonstrated in the power allocated to quantitative data and research within government documents. There is a wealth of WGO research, experience and consultation that has highlighted areas of difficulty for both progressing gender equality goals and for tackling specific issues such as EVAWG yet there remain repeated calls for further research, knowledge and data and a privileging of other forms of knowledge over that from WGOs themselves. Furthermore, the continual request for more data and better data is one that may never be completely fulfilled and can therefore act as a barrier to decision-making and progress.

## **ii) The representation in government documents**

Through examining government documents, it was also possible to see the ways in which WGOs and their work were represented in relation to very specific roles and topics, and how they were absent from other agendas. Discussion either ignores or focuses on specific aspects of WGO work and conceptualises their work as focused on supporting individual women who have been affected by gender-based violence or individual women rather than a broader gender equality agenda. In this way government is able to set the parameters of the discussion and foreclose important issues.

The use of non-specific and ambiguous language such as ‘providers’ over private sector or voluntary sector also blurs the understanding of which providers are preferred and leave open the possibility of private sector delivery of social provision over voluntary sector organisations.

The discourse associated with localism privileges a place-based view of the VCS. This affects the way that the VCS is envisaged and understood. It may have an exclusionary effect on organisations not identified with particular community locations or who work at larger geographical scales, as was noted by Ware (2013). There are many EVAWG organisations that are based within a particular locality, but their work may connect them more frequently to other EVAWG organisations and to the local authority, rather than to the local community of place in which they are situated. Social WGOs may have more local connections based on a shared community space, bringing together women and girls who are from local areas, they can also be part of a much wider network of organisations

particularly if they are part of a federated organisation. Women's organisations therefore complicate the idea of a straightforward relationship between the local community, the VCS and the state.

Importantly for EVAWG organisations, a shift to localism has meant that government is seeking ways for the local commissioning processes to fund EAWG organisations, particularly refuges. While in 2010 it was boldly stated that this would happen, in 2016 a more cautious language of 'transition' was noted recognising some of the difficulties raised by WGOs. For EAWG organisations a shift from national to local funding arrangements has created uncertainty about being recognised and supported as an important service by local commissioners as well as more practical issues such as funding from local authorities supporting women who are seen to be 'from out of area'.

This echoes the existing literature that has raised issues with local commissioning as being problematic for organisations working with women and girls that have experienced difficulties competing with larger providers and bidding for contracts in a commissioning system (Vacchelli 2015). The quantitative analysis also shows that refuges have reduced in number and income across this time and there are very small numbers of refuges supporting women facing additional disadvantages. The review of government policy included reference to sexual violence support organisations continuing to receive funding through national government. The quantitative analysis demonstrates that EAWG organisations which are primarily sexual violence support organisations have had an increase in their total income during this period. This would support the view that they have not suffered losses in income to the extent that refuges have through local commissioning but it cannot offer information about whether this increase is 'sufficient'.

### **iii) The representation in WGO documents**

These processes of regulation and classification were also evident in the ways in which WGOs discursively represented themselves and their work within their documents. In this, WGOs used their discursive power to represent themselves as a distinct group and to present the value and specialist nature of their work.

Within narratives of WGO documents and government policy documents, it was also noted there are frequent uses of adjectives such as 'vulnerable' and 'vulnerability'. While acknowledging that many women seeking support may be in precarious situations and are vulnerable to a range of harms and abuses, it is also important to reflect on the use of term 'vulnerable women'. It may suggest a permanent state of vulnerability but also a lack of recognition of sources of strength that the women may have. It could also serve to reinforce stereotypes of women as being inherently vulnerable and in need of protection by (male) rescuers.

The same may be said for the use of 'survival' imagery by the organisations themselves and campaigns which are seeking support to 'save them'. The risk is that the discussion moves away from a more rights-based demand for recognition and funding for the organisation. The right to support for women and protection from abuse is overlooked. It conceals discussion about why there may be a need for women's services and why there is inadequate support for the services that are in place, particularly for those organisations that offer front-line support that safeguards lives.

#### **iv) Summary of discursive power in the three representations**

The discussion of discursive power has highlighted the importance of noting and examining decisions about the identification and categorisation process, for transparency and scrutiny, for revealing the power of the researcher in the process and for acknowledging the scope for assumptions and bias to shape how the boundaries move to encompass or exclude organisations. It has also discussed the discursive power of data and the privileging of some kinds of knowledge over others.

The discussion has also demonstrated that the representation of WGOs in government policy is limited and limiting, with a focus on local place-based organisations within VCS documents and WGOs as specific service delivery organisations providing individualised support within the other policy documents. The wider discursive environment is also restricted to discussions about funding reductions and shifts to localism and the space for broader discussions that may question the ideology behind the policies is not available.

### **9.3.2 Dispersed, positive and negative power**

This section focuses on where power may be concentrated with ‘dominating effects’ (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016) and where power may be productive, as well as negative in relation to the three representations. This is followed by a summary.

#### **i) Quantitative representation**

The power of the classification process including implications that can be both positive and negative for WGOs, either as a tool for illuminating issues and the negotiation of resources or as a source of control, has been discussed above. There is the potential for a dataset of WGOs to provide useful long-term information about the landscape of WGOs. This can be used as a tool to reinforce and supplement qualitative findings and it could be particularly useful for organisations that have been known to have been disadvantaged but have not had access to information of this kind to support their case.

The quantitative representation as outlined above also has the potential to be a method of control, where it can be used to direct organisations toward a particular agenda. Furthermore, as outlined in the ethical considerations for this study, in making judgements about what is or is not included and how, the researcher creates a representation and in so doing exercises power.

#### **ii) Representation in government policy**

Government clearly has access to and control of more resources than WGOs and as such is positioned asymmetrically to WGOs in terms of power. Governments are able to set policy agendas and frameworks based on political priorities and other vested interests and the inclusion or exclusion of particular topics, organisations or people has real lived effects, particularly in relation to setting the parameters of debate and access to resources. WGOs and their work have been able to gain inclusion in relation to specific policy areas and the analysis of government documents suggests that this inclusion has broadened over time and taken on a wider and deeper understanding of gender inequality, suggesting a degree of WGO influence in policy-making. The quantitative and qualitative data also suggest that funding into particular WGOs such as sexual violence organisations

has increased across the period. Government has a significant role to play and power in being able to positively move forward a gender equality agenda.

### **iii) Representation in WGO documents**

WGOs are key to achieving gender equality because of their history, specialist knowledge and campaign work. WGOs also have significant sources of positive power. For some WGO organisations, the sheer number of organisations is a source of power (e.g., Girlguiding) or the number of women engaged in the organisation is a source of strength (e.g., Women's Institutes). Writing in the context of the US, Goss and Skocpol argue that member-based associations that have state and local branches are better equipped than staff-led national organisations to mobilize large numbers of women for progressive social change (Goss and Skocpol 2006). However, not all organisations may currently use this resource for gender equality purposes. Indeed, Dominelli highlights the potential for women's strengths and resources in communities to be mobilised. She draws on research by Lowndes that has found women to have different types of social capital to men which are rooted in the private and relational spheres as opposed to social capital in the formal public arenas (Lowndes 2000; Dominelli 2019). These sources of private and relational capital could be drawn upon in support of furthering equality.

For others, their reputation as a prominent women's organisation may also be a source of strength and provide access to power and resources (e.g., The Fawcett Society). Specific WGOs may face barriers through their more radical roots in feminism, others may be the 'acceptable face of feminism' (Andrews 2015). There are a small number of organisations which have a large income and are influential through the scale of resources of their organisation (e.g., Marie Stopes International or BPAS). There are also popularly supported health organisations such as organisations supporting women affected by cancer. Well-known sectors such as the EAWG sector may be able to mobilise resources and influence through their well-established networks as well as through the increased public awareness and popular support generated through campaigns such as #metoo or protests around the murder of Sarah Everard and VAWG.

Lesser-known organisations, small organisations and specialist organisations, such as organisations for women with disabilities, or organisations supporting some of the most marginalised women, may face difficulties in accessing power and financial resources. They do, however, have rich resources in the specialist knowledge and experience that they hold, and they are gaining in influence and recognition as more attention is being paid to the importance of intersectionality. Larger and smaller organisations may be able to link together to support a shared strategy, as is the case between the infrastructure organisations such as Imkaan and the Women's Resource Centre and their respective membership organisations. Organisations such as Women's Institutes, Women's Aid and Girlguiding have a large membership base and federation model that provides infrastructure support and routes to power for its members. Alliances across organisations have also been a continued feature of WGO work to date, particularly across the EVAWG sector and are discussed further in the implications for gender equality section below.

Some organisations have large numbers of women members who have the means to be able to pay to sustain the organisation without seeking large external funding to support them, provided that membership is retained, and the organisation remains popular. For other organisations, particularly those supporting women who have low incomes the ability to draw funding in this way is very limited (Salamon 1987) and they are therefore more reliant on seeking external funding sources and more vulnerable to changing political environments and policy changes. Others are impacted by policy environments and systems that do not adequately account for the specific circumstances of their services, such as refuges.

While the discussion above highlighted the unity of WGOs, increased competition and division between organisations is always a possibility, as resources become increasingly constrained. There was some evidence of distinguishing between VCS and WGOs and between different kinds of WGO, which has the potential to create division. Similarly, the above discussion has highlighted the risk of the quantitative data being used as a basis for comparison of WGO organisations and the possibility for it to be used in negative ways and to cause division.

#### **iv) Summary of dispersed, positive and negative power**

WGOs have been able to exert influence in some areas but there may be boundaries on what can be said and areas in which WGOs are able to have influence and areas where they are not. Hay suggests that:

“a strategic and hegemonic group will allow minority interests to prevail on certain issues which do not directly threaten its domination, reserving its influence for matters of greater significance. Indeed, such strategies may be crucial to the ability of an elite to maintain its hegemonic position.” (Hay 1997, p46).

The extent to which voluntary and community sector organisations are able to criticise funders such as central government has already been raised in discussions of maintaining independence for the sector. Furthermore, as outlined in chapter three the ability to raise issues of structural disadvantage is also being called in to question with a range of charities such as the National Trust and the Runnymede Trust facing challenges. This trend appears to be continuing with the Conservative Way Forward campaign group proposing that Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity is wasting taxpayers’ money and that specifically:

“Charities are directing more and more resources towards politically motivated campaigns which offer no productive value to the taxpayer and which create unnecessary division and toxicity in our political discourse” (2022, p9).

### **9.4 Difference and intersectionality**

This section focuses on the theme of difference and intersectionality. It identifies key changes across the representations and is followed by a discussion of the intersectional differences.

#### **9.4.1 Key changes**

The field of women’s charitable organisations is constantly changing and evolving. Key early charitable organisations by women for women developed through links between establishing freedoms for others and increased awareness of the lack of freedom for women, for example, the suffrage movement. The field of organisations changes over time in response to much wider cultural, social, economic, and political shifts. The quantitative findings show that there are



significant fluctuations in the income of WGOs over the period and how these are associated with changes in the wider context.

Organisations that may have been unpopular causes can shift to become popular and attract support and this is also evident in increased support for EVAWG organisations. During this relatively short time, the quantitative analysis has identified that some organisations such as those working in anti-trafficking gain support and move from being small parts of the sub-sector to attracting significant sums of funding and can then wane as policy moves to other areas. They can equally, however, become generally less popular and decline significantly, for example in the case of Townswomen's Guilds. Arneil highlights some decline in women's organisations because their:

“Foundation and original purpose has been supplanted by women's changing economic and political role, including full-time work and direct access to political power through more formal means...the decline of membership in this type of organisation is not necessarily negative from the vantage point of women's equality” (Arneil 2006, p26-27).

The data also suggests an overall consolidation of WGO who are registered charities. The number of organisations decreased but for some types of organisation aggregate income nonetheless increased, suggesting that the remaining WGOs are generally larger organisations. However, consolidation may have adverse consequences as smaller specialist services that are unable to compete against larger organisations are either taken over or closed potentially resulting in a loss of this specialist knowledge and support for women (Imkaan 2015, TUC 2016).

The quantitative analysis identified an increase in organisations providing support with gender identity in line with wider societal awareness and demand for services offering this support and aligning with the emergence of fourth wave feminism. There was also an increase in the number of EVAWG and EVAWG plus organisations. The increase in EVAWG plus organisations suggested that more services are operating, at least in part, services not just to women. The qualitative analysis of EVAWG government policy documents also identifies a need for more services for men affected by domestic abuse or sexual violence.

While a strong relationship between women and environmental campaigning and the climate crisis was identified in chapter three, the quantitative representations has not revealed specific WGOs focused on environmental issues. It may be that these exist not as charities but in different forms such as networks, alliances or community interest companies, or there may be a significant gap here. The gendered impact of climate changes was also not a strong theme in any of the documents explored, and further research in this area is important.

Changes over the period can be seen, for example, in an increased acknowledgement of WGOs and their work in policy related to EVAWG and an increased expressed commitment to naming and addressing VAWG as a gendered issue in government policy documents. Although there is agreement in all documents on the need to continue providing services for women and girls affected by gender-based violence (with debates about responsibility for funding them), significant gaps remain between the different representations of the causes of gender inequality and the proposed solutions. Little change however was detected within the government documents explored in this study, with a continued focus on a neo-liberal ideology, a decreased role for the state and a focus on individualised solutions.

#### **9.4.2 Intersectional differences**

The feminist commitment to analysing data using the principles of data feminism has been a particularly important element of this study and a point of learning for future research. It has demonstrated the value of looking in detail and depth at quantitative data and paying close attention to intersectionality to uncover previously hidden information about the different trajectories of WGOs.

The analysis of key changes across the period has highlighted the precarious and disadvantaged situation for specific types of organisations supporting women facing particular disadvantages. This includes Black and minoritised women and girls, lone parents, women who have offended, sex workers and women with disabilities. The findings correspond with existing literature using qualitative research that has suggested that women's organisations such as those supporting women affected by additional disadvantages have been particularly

affected by austerity (Heady et al. 2009; Towers and Walby 2012; Vacchelli and Kathrecha 2013; Vacchelli et al. 2015), refuges (Armstrong 2017) and OBMWG (Women's Resource Centre 2018; Imkaan 2008, 2018) have been particularly hardest hit through austerity cuts and commissioning arrangements. While causality cannot be directly attributed, the correlation between decreases in income and this period of austerity in the comprehensive quantitative research in this study does provides further evidence to support those qualitative findings. Toward the end of the period there is also some acceptance of these difficulties within government policy, for example within the 'Transforming the response to Domestic Abuse consultation':

"We recognise that specialist organisations often struggle to win funding from local commissioning channels and in competition with mainstream organisations" (Home Office and Ministry of Justice 2019, p35).

The policy, however, is not revised, and the proposed solution is a period of continued or extended 'transformation' with the same end goal.

The study has also considered the changes for organisations across broad geographical locations. The analysis showed disparities in the locations of WGOs where primarily social organisations are located in more affluent areas and organisations providing services in the less affluent areas. In particular it highlighted the difficulties of access to services for all women and girls and a concentration of services in some regions. There were significant differences between the regions with the lowest number of WGO per 100k population - Yorkshire and the Humber, which had just 4.6 WGOs per 100k and the highest - South East with 10.23. Tracking changes between 2008 and 2018 has also found that regional differences have persisted across the period with the greatest losses of organisations in the South West, Wales and the East. London had the least change between 2008 and 2018. The area with the lowest number of WGOs per 100k population in 2008 was London (6.69), but in 2018 this was Yorkshire and the Humber (4.6) and the West Midlands (5.97). These findings support those of Clifford (2012) and Clifford et al., (2013) in relation to the wider VCS that noted that less deprived local areas had a higher prevalence of VCS organisations, but that certain kinds of organisations are more prevalent in more deprived local areas.

Across both WGO documents and government documents relating to EVAWG there is a greater and wider inclusion of issues affecting women facing multiple disadvantages. This is not so prevalent in wider VCS documents which do not discuss gender. By the end of the period of analysis in 2018, it had not translated into significantly increased income for the Black and minoritised women and girls organisations.

## **9.5 What are the implications for gender equality?**

Drawing together the findings in chapters six to eight, and the discussion so far, six key implications for gender equality can be identified, discussed in turn below:

1) the continued importance of gender equality and intersectionality, 2) the constrained space for challenging gender inequality 3) adaptation and evolution 4) a 'distinct' sector 5) funding for the sector and 6) mobilising sources of power.

### **9.5.1 The continued importance of gender equality and intersectionality**

The number and range of organisations that support women with key issues of childcare, pregnancy, health, abuse and exploitation demonstrates that such organisations are still needed. Indeed, the keywords identified to help locate women's organisations within the quantitative analysis themselves tell a story of the gender inequality issues that continue to be important to women and women's organisations. Many organisations are supporting women who have been affected by issues directly related to gender inequality. Organisation types often relate to abuse, exploitation, women's health, women's reproductive role and caring responsibilities or providing designated spaces for women to come together. Changes in types and particularly increases in support for some key topics such as gender equality, gender identity and EVAWG testify to a continued relevance and commitment to tackling gender equality issues. New organisations and groups of women continue to form and from a fourth wave of feminism from 2012 onwards, organisations have emerged to campaign against austerity cuts to women's services (Sisters Uncut 2023). Some organisations provide practical solutions either independently from government or supported by government while others provide challenge and a campaigning role. Many perform more than one role (Young 2000).

The quantitative analysis supports existing qualitative research that there have been reductions in the limited number of a range of specialist organisations for women and girls. The quantitative research has demonstrated that this is specifically the case for organisations supporting lone parents, organisations supporting Black and minoritised women and girls and women seeking refuge, who have also recorded lower levels of income. Similarly, the geographical distribution of WGOs suggests that more affluent areas have had less of a decline in the number of organisations. This highlights that it is critical to consider gender and its intersection with other disadvantages.

### **9.5.2 The constrained space for challenging gender inequality**

While gender equality is increasingly recognised in government policy statements specifically linked to issues such as EVAWG, it is also problematic that in other policy areas this is inconsistent or non-existent. Where gender inequality is recognised, it is limited to individual behaviours rather than an acknowledgement of structural issues. Increasing awareness of gender inequality issues, gender stereotypes, healthy relationships and sources of support are all important but only take things so far and are not at the scale needed for significant change. Activities such as increased information sharing and education focus on how individuals can improve their awareness of issues of gender equality and ways in which they may be perpetuating gender inequality, but it does not change the ways in which the social, economic and political context is organised such that that inequality is created and reinforced in more insidious ways. Similarly, the dominant discourse by government about WGOs focuses on their role in delivering services, particularly on EVAWG and women affected by the criminal justice system. The wider roles of campaigning for and promoting gender equality remain essential but are not discussed and supported.

In continuing to raise and discuss issues of *structural* inequality in their work, WGOs are ensuring that there is recognition of its importance and that it is included in wider policy discussions and decision-making. Gender blind policies such as Big Society and austerity have not considered the needs of specific groups facing additional and intersectional disadvantage which has had serious effects on the lives of many women as policies have not taken account of the impact on women or the organisations that support them. Furthermore, when

crises have happened, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability of women and the organisations that support them to be able to respond and continue their work is challenged due to already depleted resources.

Including gender inequality and capitalising on the potential for WGOs to contribute to a broader gender equality agenda within government policy would give increased weight and visibility to the issue, which in turn could lead to greater progress. The expertise and knowledge of WGOs could contribute significantly if there are real commitments to tackling structural inequality and their work is supported to provide them with the resources necessary to facilitate increased involvement. Furthermore, the specialist knowledge of those WGOs working with women who are most disadvantaged could ensure that policy development takes account of and seeks to redress the additional and often complex barriers they face.

The scope for WGOs to focus on gender inequality while also either maintaining service delivery or campaigning for organisations to be funded to deliver services is limited by their resources. This in turn thwarts conversations about progression of gender equality goals and tackling structural inequality. The work of many WGOs remains vital as issues of VAWG, police and gender-based violence, the rise in men involved in Incel ideology (Dodd 2023) and increased exposure of young people to misogyny (Fazackerley 2023) continue.

### **9.5.3 WGOs adapting and evolving**

An increase in organisations supporting not just women, as raised in the literature review has been supported by the data analysis in this study. Organisations such as the Women's Resource Centre (2018a) raise the issue of pressure on women's organisations to deliver services to men and a lack of understanding of Equality Act 2010 legislation allowing for the provision of single sex services. There are also wider public debates about the need for women-only services and spaces and the inclusion/exclusion of Trans women as discussed in chapter three. These all highlight live issues for the women's sector and raise questions about how WGOs can evolve to meet the persistent challenges of gender inequality. The increased inclusion of not just women on boards and as beneficiaries in organisations which originally set up solely for women may also

bring positive benefits of increased numbers of allies, the wider acknowledgement of other survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence, and recognition that gender inequality causes issues for all in society.

Many WGOs have adapted and changed to meet new needs and concerns as they have arisen. This has included raising the alarm at austerity policies and their impact both on the women and girls they support as well as the impact on WGOs. While some organisations during the period have been able to continue to campaign, to respond to challenges around diversity and inclusion and the COVID-19 crisis and increase their resources this has not been equitable across all organisation types. Organisations for Black and Minoritised Women and Girls (OBMWG) have declined in both number and income levels. The discursive space for representation, discussion and campaigning is therefore at risk with continued low levels and funding for organisations supporting disadvantaged groups. Inequality is exacerbated as a result.

It is notable however that the decline in number for some organisations such as general welfare, health and education OBMWG has not been as great as the income drop which may suggest that some organisations are currently finding ways to continue in spite of adversity. Over a longer term, this may not be sustainable, relies on the labour of women under increased pressure, and would be intensified if demand for services continues to increase.

Finally, there are new and ongoing challenges to gender equality. The impact of climate change has not featured in any of the representations that were analysed, yet as stated in chapter three given the gendered implications of climate change this is an important gap.

#### **9.5.4 Funding for the sector**

The amount and nature of funding needed by WGOs is an issue that dominates across all of the analysis areas. An urgent need for funding to support women 'in the here and now' is called for by WGOs but funding alone cannot deal with a continued and increasing demand for provision. The government policy documents focus on a need for austerity-based cuts and identifying funding from new sources. Meanwhile WGOs focus on the very real difficulties of delivering

services with few resources and greater demand than can be met. Through the quantitative analysis, this study has focused on income as an important dimension within the data and in so doing it has also therefore perpetuated the focus on funding.

The levels of funding needed to provide all the services required for women are certainly greater than those currently received by the sector. Although some WGOs have experienced an increased income, it has been beyond the scope of the study to examine sources of funding but the quantitative analysis suggests that income for many organisations, particularly those supporting some of the most disadvantaged groups has not increased.

There are great differences between organisations within the sector in terms of the amount of income they require to do their work. Social organisations are able to raise sufficient funds without the need for external input because their overheads are low, are volunteer-led, and their members are largely able to contribute financially. Other organisations provide intensive support services, may maintain buildings and/or provide housing and a number of staff, and as such their overheads are high and the women they work with are frequently not in a position to be able to contribute. As stated above, these organisations are not easily able to operate outside the realm of government support, whether or not this position and lack of independence is desirable.

#### **9.5.5 A 'distinct' sector**

WGOs clearly articulated that they constitute a separate and distinct sector. Increased competition for resources may have led to an emphasis on specialisms and distinctions between WGOs. WGOs are also part of a wider VCS. The balance between being a specialist sector and also part of a wider sector is an important consideration because it has implications for how they are able to influence policy and access resources.

Although discourses from wider VCS organisations have not been analysed in this study, academic research on the VCS has highlighted that there is also space to include more explicitly gender sensitive and intersectional approaches to research in this area (Dodge et al. 2022). This is particularly the case, as



highlighted in previous chapters, where women form a majority of staff and volunteers in the VCS and men make up the majority of sector leaders. Gender inequality is not just an issue for women and the issues facing WGOs are not just for the women's sector but are also of relevance to a wider sector and society. Wider change will rely on alliances and conversations across the whole VCS as well as across WGOs. This is particularly important when VCS organisations have been found to replicate the inequality located in wider society whether this is racism, sexism or other oppressive practice that will need to be addressed (Lingayah et al. 2020; Gillespie et al. 2019).

#### **9.5.6 Mobilising sources of power**

For WGOs it is important to be able to mobilise the sources of power that are available. The creation of a dataset of WGOs who registered charities is a source of power (a resource) that can be used to demonstrate changes in the landscape of WGOs. It is not a replacement for privileging the voices of WGOs who have lived experience of being a WGO organisation and supporting women and girls (D'iganzio and Klein 2020). Rather, it offers further information and an indication of what is happening for WGOs on a broader level and can be a basis from which to challenge inequality.

The documentary analysis in chapter seven provides evidence that WGOs are able to exert some influence, although it is unclear if this is only within the context of what is considered a possibility by government (Hay 1997). Mobilising the ability of WGOs to shift the discourse in order to increase the range of what is possible, becomes an important strategy for effecting change. With increased attention on EVAWG, renewed commitments to challenging inequality and recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, it is possible that there are currently opportunities for progress. Mintrom and True explored COVID-19 as a 'policy window' for reducing VAW and concluded that although an opportunity for change has been presented:

“Change will only occur if advocacy systems are well-established and strategic actors have practiced the drills that support the rapid diffusion of policy knowledge and action.” (Mintrom and True 2022, p152).

In any event, preparation for a moment when change is possible is essential. This study has identified that there may be additional potential allies available in the wide range of organisations that are working with women and likely allies beyond WGOs. There are a number of prominent organisations within the sector providing support to WGOs such as Imkaan and the Women's Resource Centre, as well as federated organisations providing support for their membership such as Women's Aid, Girlguiding and Women's Institutes who are able to draw on their prominence to raise issues with government and keep structural inequalities on the agenda. There are histories of working as alliances and this was shown in joint responses to the Domestic Abuse Bill 2019 and through the formation of the End Violence Against Women and Girls coalition (End Violence Against Women 2023).

As Craig et al. note, alliances can be an important strategy for organisations to effect change and can facilitate divisions of labour, where some organisations can work 'on the inside' and others on the 'outside' (Craig et al. 2004, p234). As Butler suggests:

"Perhaps the most important issue is to make coalitions where we did not think they were possible. I am not saying that those would be easy. But this is a time in which both feminism and LGBTQIA+ perspectives are being censored in educational institutions, where rights that were hard-won are being repealed, and where healthcare is being restricted or denied by both social policy and economic costs". (Butler 2020)

## **9.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter has discussed the findings in relation to the four core themes of the research: power, visibility, difference and intersectionality and concluding with reflections on the key implications for gender equality. In so doing, it has brought together reflections on the three different representations that form the basis of this study to address the final research question.

In order to reach a position where the need for services is reducing over time as issues of gender inequality are addressed, the very gender-based systems and structures on which society operates will need to be questioned and discussed. To do this, there needs to be space within prominent discourse for this discussion

to take place. At the moment, this study indicates that this space is slowly expanding but progress is limited, contingent and precarious.

## Chapter ten: Conclusion

### 10.1 Summary of the study

This study has explored WGOs in England and Wales between 2008 and 2020. This was argued to be particularly important in the context of austerity and crises where the stakes are high, resources are limited and extant research suggests that women and girls in general, particularly those facing additional and intersecting disadvantages and the organisations that support them, have been disproportionately affected.

The study was set within a feminist post-structural framework to investigate the ways in which WGOs and their work have been represented during this time and considered the implications of these representations for gender equality. It was suggested that a focus on representation and discourse would provide an effective way to view WGOs, how they represent themselves and their work, how government discourse represents them and their work and the effects of these representations on progressing gender equality. Three representations were selected for this purpose – a quantitative representation, the representation in government policy and the representation in WGO documents.

The quantitative representation worked through the process of constructing the dataset of WGOs that are registered as charities, highlighting issues of power and visibility within identification and categorisation and the need for critical perspectives on this process. The completed dataset provided details on the landscape of the sector between 2008 and 2018. Particular attention was drawn to the experiences of organisations supporting women and girls facing additional disadvantages, demonstrating that there are varying levels of resources both *between* and *within* types of organisations. It also highlighted a greater range of WGOs than commonly conceived, noting that not all are progressive but that there is the potential for more alliances and mobilising of the sources of power within the sector.

The use of the ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) methodology offered a consistent way to explore the different sets of data, questioning the meanings and biases that are within them. Each representation highlighted both

complementary and differing needs and agendas, but also noted where the discourses were fixed and where they were changing.

The study discussed the findings in relation to the feminist post-structural themes of visibility, power, difference and intersectionality, and gender equality. This thematic analysis used a novel approach to place the representations in conversation with each other and reflect on similarities and differences. It has shown that WGOs lack visibility as part of the VCS which is problematic for them and for broader gender inequality goals. The analysis has demonstrated the importance of power dynamics and the ways in which different discourses shape the role of WGOs and their work and the ways in WGOs also use discourse to further their own goals. It has also highlighted that a focus on specific topics, such as the reduction in state spending, limits the scope for broader discussion about gender equality.

The thematic analysis has shown the changing landscape of WGOs in the wider social, economic and political environment. In particular, the increased awareness of women and girls facing additional and intersecting disadvantages was noted but this was set against significant disparities in resources for the organisations supporting them, suggesting dissonance between the increased discourse and the distribution of resources.

## **10.2 Contribution**

This section explains how the thesis contributes to existing knowledge in five main ways. Chapters two and three identified from the literature five main gaps in existing knowledge. Each of the identified gaps are specified below, alongside the specific contribution made by this research.

### **i) Limited exploration of a definition of a WGO**

The literature review identified a limited debate about the definition of a WGO which has often assumed to be an organisation 'by and for' women and girls. This study has problematised the idea of a 'by and for' definition of WGOs to illuminate the ways in which the boundaries of the definition are more permeable and contested. In operationalising a definition of WGOs for the study, it has also reflected on the methodological implications of definitional and category choices

for the inclusion and exclusion of certain groups and organisations. Furthermore, through the WPR analysis it has also demonstrated positive and negative boundary management by WGOs further illuminating the contested nature of the space. This study has also drawn attention to the prevalence of a limiting representation of WGOs in government policy that focuses on WGOs as service-delivery organisations narrowing their role and constraining the way in which they are conceptualised.

## **ii) Who are WGOs?**

The literature review has confirmed a paucity of knowledge about who WGOs are, specifically what organisations may comprise a landscape of WGOs, what they do (purpose and activities), their levels of resourcing and where they are located. There has been specific research focused on particular types of WGO such as EAWG organisations, but research that reflects on the diversity and breadth of the sector was largely absent. For the first time this study has used regulatory data to advance empirical understanding of the size and shape of WGOs as a group. In the process it has created a dataset of organisations that can be used for further research, but in so doing has highlighted the scope, complexity and limits of this knowledge. As a result, more is now known about the range of WGOs, their relative size and income levels and geographical locations. Importantly, this also includes the development of detailed sub-categories of WGO which have been developed from the data and which allow for intersectional analysis of WGO types and a more nuanced understanding and complex representation of them.

## **iii) Limited quantitative knowledge about WGOs between 2008 and 2018**

Important quantitative research has been conducted about the impact of austerity on VCS organisations in general, including, analysis of where this impact is most likely to have been most severe (Clifford 2013, 2017). However, due to the absence of identifying markers in regulatory data for WGOs, there has been no analysis of the specific impact of austerity on WGOs prior to this thesis. For research seeking to understand the scope of the sector or examine changes to WGOs over time, the lack of data on WGOs had been a significant frustration.

This thesis has utilised the dataset created as part of the study to examine what changes have taken place for WGOs during this period and to draw comparisons with the wider VCS. Critically, this analysis has been carried out from a feminist perspective that has focused on the importance of a detailed and intersectional analysis to explore the implications for specific groups that may be particularly disadvantaged. As a result, new knowledge has been generated about which particular kinds of WGO have experienced changes in income and size including where such changes have been particularly negative such as organisations for Black and minoritized women and girls and refugees, or positive such as EVAWG organisations working to end sexual violence or gender equality organisations. It has also identified broader trends in the creation and decline of types of organisations across the period.

**iv) Gaps within qualitative and mixed method research about WGOs between 2008 and 2018**

Extant research about austerity pointed to the gendered impact of austerity on women and girls and particularly those facing additional disadvantages. Research about WGOs has primarily been qualitative. It has suggested several clear issues such as increased demand for services, funding concerns, specific difficulties for specialist WGOs supporting women and girls facing additional disadvantages and a compromised ability to campaign.

Although this knowledge provided a firm base on which to develop this study, a number of key gaps were identified. There were no studies that analysed across a longer time frame to consider shifts and changes between 2008 and 2020. Research has mainly focused on specific types of WGO such as EVAWG organisations and as such there was insufficient knowledge across the whole landscape of organisations for women and girls. This study used a broad definition of WGOs to encompass a wider view of who WGOs may be and has expanded knowledge by reflecting on different representations across a range of organisations between 2008 and 2020.

Research on WGOs usually drew on interview and small survey data and no studies were identified that reflected on shifting discourses and representations of WGOs within documents and how they may give insight into changes in the

environment between 2008 and 2020. This study has examined how WGOs can be represented in at least three different forms, using mixed methods. This includes a quantitative form, in government policy and in documents produced by WGOs. The focus on representations through the analysis of discourse within government policy and WGO documents has provided important new insight into the dynamics of the period including for example ongoing debates about the recognition of WGOs as a distinct and important part of the wider VCS.

This study has demonstrated that there is limited discursive space for some issues to be raised such as resourcing and that discussions occur within specific parameters. For example the study has shown that there is a focus on a need for increased income rather than broader questions of why and how WGOs should be funded and by whom. A focus on discourse has also revealed that government representations of the role of WGOs centre on their capacity for service delivery while within WGO documents they are limited by the need to allocate important resources to raising awareness about their work and the need for support. The study has also revealed that there are key differences in the way in which terms such as gender equality are used with divergent understandings of the 'root causes' of gender inequality reflected in WGOs and government documents. These barriers mean that certain fundamental issues are made invisible such as structural inequality as space and resources to explore adequate solutions are limited both discursively and in time and resources by the austerity and neo-liberal agenda.

Through close analysis using WPR, the study has also shown that although government has 'recognised' issues facing WGOs particularly in relation to the local commissioning environment, it has also nevertheless continued to pursue a policy direction of increased localism and a reduction in central state responsibility. Similarly, while government has included more reference to the specific issues experienced by women and girls facing additional disadvantages, it has retained limits on who is able to access support through for example the exclusion of women with insecure immigration status. This indicates that the topics that are discussed and the representations of WGOs and their work are constrained.



The study has raised important new questions about how and why WGOs are missing from broader VCS agendas and debates and are marginalised within VCS research. It has highlighted the importance of including gender within general VCS research as well as government policy.

The study has drawn attention to WGOs as a 'distinct' sector with its own history and identity. It has also shown both persistence and resistance on the part of WGOs. This was demonstrated in the continuation of organisations despite falling and or fluctuating income levels and in WGO documents with a continued commitment to raising awareness of issues facing their organisations and the women and girls they support. Furthermore, it has directed attention to potential sources of power for WGOs such as the range and scope of organisations supporting women and girls and potential opportunities for further alliances and joint working. It has also noted increases in awareness and support for the work of EVAWG organisations and a need for continued adaptation and evolution to the changing economic, social, political and environmental context.

**v) An absence of studies using a feminist post-structural approach**

A lack of feminist approaches to quantitative research within VCS studies was highlighted through the literature review. In response, this study has provided a feminist theoretical analysis of WGOs including an example of the application of feminist quantitative methodology (D'iganzio and Klein 2020). This has highlighted the utility and significance of the approach in uncovering otherwise hidden differences in the experiences of organisations. For example, how the aggregate income of general welfare organisations for Black and minoritised women and girls compared to other general welfare organisations has differed and been less positive.

Furthermore, the study has utilised a novel approach combining mixed methods within a post-structural feminist framework. The differences of each representation were explored using a unique methodology to demonstrate and critique the ways in which WGOs are constructed, represented and limited by the discourses of them and their work. Using the 'What's the Problem Represented to be? (WPR) approach (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016) an analysis across three

different sources of data has been conducted including (as far as the researcher is aware) the first application of WPR to quantitative data analysis.

The discussion of the research has also been led by the four key post-structural themes – visibility, power, difference and intersectionality and gender equality. These organising concepts have provided a useful analysis framework in the research. These approaches may also have resonance with other sectors in the VCS and provides a scaffold for further research either in the production of other representations or in the application of the approach to other fields in the UK or internationally.

These contributions are particularly important because of the ongoing austerity and global crises, where women and particularly those most disadvantaged continue to be affected to a greater extent than others. They raise important questions and avenues for further research.

### **10.3 Limitations and further research**

There are a number of limitations which have been identified within the research. The construction of the quantitative representation is limited to WGOs that are registered charities in England and Wales. As such more informal groups, that are under-researched and yet constitute a significant proportion of the voluntary sector population, have been excluded (Phillimore et al. 2010). It also excludes projects who may operate within the confines of a larger organisation and are not separately registered, as well as work carried out to address gender equality by organisations who do not identify as a women's organisation.

The research does not include groups and organisations and those who may have alternate legal or structural forms. The register of charities does account for a significant number and likely proportion of WGOs (Damm et al. 2023) but it is also important to note that there may be a trend toward more social enterprise forms or CICs rather than registered charities which may impact on access to data for future research.

Similarly, if a fourth wave feminism is based on greater levels of interaction and campaign work in online spaces, then this also raises questions for the future use

of regulatory data as a marker of WGO activity. Further research on the extent to which Charity Commission registration is being bypassed for alternate structures and how data on VCS organisations such as WGOs can be better captured is therefore an important future research area.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis the quantitative data ran to 2018 rather than 2020 which means that changes in the environment after 2018 and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are not examined here. Further research on WGOs that continues beyond 2018 and that can be maintained and updated is critical for further longitudinal perspective on changes to the sector.

The qualitative research focused on UK national government policy in relation to WGOs in England. Research that includes the other UK nations is also important to reflect on how WGOs are represented but has been beyond the scope of this study (Sanders 2022). Given the importance of local government and other statutory bodies outside of the national government in the work of WGOs, further research at sub-national levels would provide additional and essential insight.

Similarly, the qualitative research from WGOs was limited to a specific set of organisations and as such cannot be said to be representative of the whole WGO sector. There are many other organisations that could have been selected and which may have yielded other fruitful lines of research and reflection. In a similar way, choices about which documents and publications to analyse are freighted with questions of what has/has not been included and the implications of those choices. Limitations here include those organisations who do not produce documents, or who produce documents which are not available via internet access or in English or who are not easily found through searches. The selection criteria for choosing publications will inevitably privilege some over others. The post-structural approach rather than provide an 'accurate reflection', opens up this process of selection, analysis and conclusion to critical scrutiny.

Issues such as the ongoing impact of Black Lives Matter, 'the culture wars' and environmental degradation have been important social, economic and political factors that have not been strong elements of current research and which, in the context of gender equality, merit sustained and urgent attention.

#### **10.4 Concluding remarks**

This research aimed to explore three different representations of WGOs between 2008 and 2020. Based on a mixed method approach using quantitative analysis of Charity Commission data and qualitative analysis of WGO documents and government policy documents from across the period, it concluded that WGOs can be represented in a number of ways where different approaches yield differing emphases on who they are and the work that they do. Each representation demonstrated that WGOs are facing difficult issues about how to attract and retain visibility and value for their work and how to address the wider goals of gender equality. These issues are particularly challenging in a turbulent and difficult context where minimising state funding and solutions that focus on individuals dominate policy discourse and strategy. Although gender inequality is acknowledged at a performative level within government policy, it is not sufficiently prioritised or addressed in practice. The space for WGOs to discuss and progress gender equality is also limited by the practical difficulties of insufficient income to provide services to the increasing number of women and girls that need them. Through this exploration, the study has identified ways in which discourses about WGOs and their work are absent or limiting, resulting in insufficient consideration of WGOs and the women and girls they support and limiting discussion about the progression of broader gender equality. It has also highlighted potential positive sources of power for WGOs to continue the work of supporting women and girls and campaigning for gender equality.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Summary of selected government policy documents relating to VCS.

Title	Summary
Building the Big Society (2010)	<p>Building the Big Society was at the forefront of Cameron’s policy for the voluntary sector proposed as part of the new Coalition government in 2010. It is a short document outlining a number of commitments to “put more power and opportunity into people’s hands” (2010, p1). It contains five key proposals 1) Give communities more powers, 2) Encourage people to take an active role in their communities, 3) Transfer power from central to local government, 4) Support co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises and 5) Publish government data. Building the Big Society outlines a future where central government has only a facilitative role in passing power and information to local levels so that they can solve the problems they face.</p>
Civil Society Strategy (2018)	<p>The Civil Society strategy emphasises the state role as a facilitator and convenor rather than as responsible for solving problems. A much longer document than Building Big Society it is also far more wide ranging in scope. Arguably it seeks to move beyond the view of a VCS to encompass a focus on a much broader civil society and gives increased attention to private sector organisations and social enterprises and much less emphasis on what it terms ‘traditional’ charities.</p> <p>The Civil Society Strategy focuses on what it terms the five foundations of social value: people, places, the social sector, the private sector and the public sector. The document outlines four missions relating specifically to what it now terms the social sector: 1) the voice of civil society, 2) funding and financing the social sector, 3) leadership, support and regulation, and 4) a social sector confident with digital.</p>

	<p>There is overall an emphasis on community and local place-based organisations and the role of actors from outside central government in taking on society's issues.</p>
<p>Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant (The Kruger Report) (2020)</p>	<p>Although not a government policy document, The Kruger report provides the most recent example of thinking around the role of the VCS from a Conservative position and one which is close to government. Tasked by Boris Johnson with how we can 'harness' the power of community action that was so important and prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic to assist with Johnson's flagship policy of 'levelling up', Kruger explores a wide variety of avenues for the future of the VCS.</p> <p>There is an emphasis on giving power and responsibility to local communities, a role for increased philanthropy and business but also a new and heightened emphasis on the role of faith organisations in what he terms a 'new deal with faith communities'. A key proposal is for a 'social covenant'.</p> <p>"The social covenant i.e., the mutual commitment by citizens, civil society and the state, each to fulfil their discrete responsibilities and to work together for the common good of all" (2020,p14).</p> <p>This covenant contains four articles; 1) Public purpose, 2) Subsidiarity and inclusion, 3) Strengths-based approaches and 4) Social infrastructure.</p>

## Appendix 2: Summary of selected government policy documents relating to EVAWG, Women affected by the Criminal Justice System and Gender Equality.

### EVAWG

Title	Summary
Tackling violence against women a cross government narrative (2008)	This report was based on the Labour government activity over the previous 18 months and aims to report on activities that have been undertaken in relation to ending violence against women.
Call to end violence against women and girls 2010 to 2015 Government policy: violence against women and girls (2011)	A Conservative led government strategy to end violence against women and girls setting out a strategic vision for work between 2010 and 2015. Notably the focus is now on women <i>and</i> girls.
Ending violence against women and girls strategy 2016-2020 (2016)	This strategy aimed to provide a strategy for the next four years building on the pillars of the previous strategy.
Ending violence against women and girls 2016-2020 strategy refresh (2019)	Ending violence against women and girls strategy refresh is an update on delivery achieved so far and identifies additional actions.
Transforming the response to Domestic Abuse Consultation Response and Draft Bill (2019)	A response that draws together responses to the Domestic Abuse consultation and includes a draft bill for the new Domestic Abuse Bill with measures to sit alongside the legislation.

### Women affected by the Criminal Justice System

Title	Summary
Delivering the Government response to the Corston Report (2008)	A progress report on meeting the needs of vulnerable women within the criminal justice system in response to the Corston report, a review of women in the criminal justice system (2007).

The Female Offender strategy (2018)	The strategy focuses on the increased number of women who receive custodial sentences and the need to move toward more appropriate community-based sentences.
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## Gender Equality

Title	Summary
The Equality Strategy- Building a Fairer Britain (2010)	This report seeks to mark a change from the Labour to Liberal Democrat-Conservative coalition government and as such emphasises a break from past policies that it sees as focused on legislation and bureaucracy in favour of an equality strategy focused on individuals and behaviour change.
Gender Equality at every stage: a roadmap for change (2019)	The strategy identifies 8 drivers of inequality 1) limiting attitudes to gender 2) women tend to work in lower paid sectors and occupations, and are less likely to progress 3) the working age benefits systems hasn't always tackled the disadvantages that women and those with caring responsibilities face 4) women take more time out of the labour market to care for children 5) women are providing more informal care and unpaid work for others 6) some women face barriers returning to or entering the labour market 7) women are more likely to face financial instability later in life due to decisions taken throughout working life 8) we need to ensure that we sustain strong foundations for the future.

### Appendix 3: Summary of Women and Girls Organisations' documents

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Title	Summary
A right to exist (2008)	An open access document directed at policy-makers arguing that the shift to a supporting people funding framework has disproportionately negatively affected refugees that support Black and minoritised ethnicity women.
Beyond the labels (2013)	This document focuses on raising awareness about violence against women and girls and specifically directed at the Mayor of London and other policy-makers.
Capital losses (2016)	Capital losses focuses on the loss of funding to specialist 'by and for' organisations supporting Black and minoritised ethnicity women affected by violence against women. The problem is represented as a loss of specialist services 'by and for' Black and minoritised ethnicity women as larger less specialised providers are favoured in service commissioning processes. There is a lack of understanding of the need for specialism and this is resulting in a loss of independence and the knowledge of specialist providers as well as causing additional challenges for them.
Survival to sustainability (2018)	Survival to sustainability highlights that organisations by and for Black and minoritised women affected by VAWG are at risk and need to be supported to survive.
The impact of the dual pandemics (Banga and Roy, 2020)	This document outlines the severe difficulties faced by specialist 'by and for' Black and minoritised women's organisations. It argues that the underlying pre-existing structural inequality faced by the organisations and the women they support has been exacerbated by an increase in VAWG and the COVID-19 pandemic. The issues outlined include the intersectional disadvantage faced by women with protected characteristics and the fact that they are therefore more at risk of economic disadvantage, job losses, risk of violence, health issues as a result of existing inequality worsened by the COVID-19 crisis.



## Women's Aid

Title	Summary
Women's Aid Annual Survey 2009-10 (Barron 2011)	The Women's Aid annual survey provides a picture of the scale of Women's Aid services in England, Wales, NI and Scotland over the year, a snapshot of one day and feedback from services. The representation centres on how the provision of services is crucial to the safety and well-being of women and that this provision is currently under-resourced to meet need.
A growing crisis of unmet need (Taylor 2013)	This document outlines a funding crisis in the ending violence against women and girls sector, particularly fuelled by local commissioning process issues. The problem is represented as being caused by local government commissioning processes and pressures on local government to make cost saving decisions that are putting vital services for women and girls at risk. Similarly, it is argued that women's services suffer from historical chronic under-funding and a 'hostile environment' where full cost recovery and business development have never been supported creating a lack of capacity to engage with competitive tendering processes.
SOS Save refugees save lives (Women's Aid 2014)	This document highlights the crisis situation in the ending violence against women and girls sector. It is argued that funding cuts to refugees and changes to commissioning practices which do not always value specialist services have resulted in restrictions on services and the closure of refuges. It proposes that the need for refuges is also beyond current capacity and the recommended number of refuge places are not being provided and that policies of localism work against the national network of refuge provision where women may need to travel to escape perpetrators of abuse.
Funding specialist support for domestic abuse survivors (Davidge, 2019)	'Funding specialist support for domestic abuse survivors' outlines the lack of sustainable funding and support for specialist domestic abuse support sector organisations. A lack of investment, localism and a commissioning landscape that prioritises cost saving have been problematic and are said to have caused a funding crisis. Removing ringfences

	on the supporting people programme is argued to have led to funding being absorbed into local authority budgets.
A Perfect Storm: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Domestic Abuse Survivors and the Services Supporting Them (Davidge, 2020)	A perfect storm aims to bring together research by Women's Aid into the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic abuse survivors and services to make a series of recommendations for improving the situation. The report focuses on three key areas – impact on survivors, impact on children and impact on Women's Aid organisations.

### Women's Resource Centre

Title	Summary
Hidden Value: demonstrating the extraordinary impact of women's voluntary & community organisations (2011)	Hidden Value is a summary of research conducted to assess the 'hidden value' of women's organisations using a Social Return on Investment (SROI) approach. The problem that the document seeks to address is the lack of capacity of women's organisations to inform funders about the value of their services. Women's organisations are often at a disadvantage in the commissioning marketplace as they may not be the cheapest provider of services. The SROI highlights the broader impact and value for money that women's organisation's offer.
Surviving the crisis: the impact of public spending cuts on women's voluntary and community organisations (n.d.)	The context for this document is the ongoing funding crisis faced by women's organisations that has been caused by austerity, commissioning reform and increased demand. It argues that a women's sector is at risk of disappearing with a resultant loss of vital services for women and a loss of expertise for organisations and the sector which cannot easily be rebuilt. The women's organisation sector is positioned as specialist and has benefits to women, families and wider communities but suffers from a lack of acknowledgement/understanding of women's organisations and wider equality issues. It details particular difficulties for specialist organisations supporting Black and minoritised

	women and girls, LGBT and disability focused women's groups.
Hearing women's voices: Why women? (2018)	Hearing women's voices: why women? provides evidence of the value and effectiveness of women's organisations. The problem is articulated to be a lack of understanding and recognition that mixed spaces are not perceived as comfortable or safe spaces particularly for the most marginalised women.
Life-changing and life-saving funding for the women's sector (2018)	Life-changing and life-saving funding for the women's sector argues that funding for women's organisations does not reflect the social value they generate nor the money they save the state. It proposes that funding for women's organisations has been negatively affected by a range of important factors including austerity, a move from grants to contracts, the short term nature of funding, the lack of funding for core costs and demand for 'innovative' projects, a push for mixed-sex services and the implications of Brexit.
The crisis of Covid-19 and UK women's charities (2020)	<p>This report argues that the COVID-19 crisis has led to a lockdown where home is not always a safe place and has increased isolation from services and mental health issues. It suggests that there is a need to adapt service provision to meet these needs and to ensure services and information are accessible for service users, especially for those who are facing struggle for survival or without adequate resources and communication methods. It notes particularly increased difficulties for disabled women in accessing care and facing isolation. Ensuring staff wellbeing and retention during the crisis is also highlighted as important.</p> <p>The report argues that insecure funding for Black and minoritised women led organisations in particular is concerning. Organisations are said to be facing a loss of income alongside a steep increase in demand for services and there is a lack of time and resources for fundraising as dealing with crisis is the priority.</p>

## Women in Prison

Title	Summary
Home truths: Housing for women in the criminal justice system (2016)	This document outlines the link between chronic housing shortages and difficulties for women who offend. It suggests that there are further problems identified for women with particular backgrounds or experiences that mean they are particularly disadvantaged in accessing housing. Furthermore, it states that there is a lack of integrated approaches between services to provide and support women to access housing exacerbates the issues further.
A response to the justice Select committee inquiry into the Government's Transforming Rehabilitation Programme (2017a)	The document is a response to a select committee inquiry into the Government's transforming rehabilitation programme. The response argues that the transforming rehabilitation programme (TR) has proven to be deeply damaging to the organisation and has resulted in negative outcomes for women participating in the scheme and for the women's organisation's supporting them. It suggests that a number of key structural issues have impeded the ability to provide support to women which include the lack of housing, mental health services and substance misuse services. Furthermore, it continues to state that a lack of clarity of roles has meant that there have been expectations that women's organisations carry out tasks that are 'probation officer roles'. It is argued that this has compromised the organisation's independence and the nature of their relationship with the women they support and that a focus on specific outcomes and groups has also prevented some women from being able to access support.
A response to the Justice Select Committee: Prison population 2022: planning for the future inquiry (2017b)	The document argues that prison is overpopulated with women who should not be there, yet prison increases the risk of re-offending. The report highlights that only in the last 20 years the prison population of women has been higher than 2,020. Only in 1996 did it rise above 2000, in 1998, 3000 and in 2002, it had exceeded 4000. Community support provision is the answer to tackling causes/vulnerabilities of women who have offended. The purpose of the response is to highlight the need for community-based holistic support and housing options to support women with 'root causes'. Women's centres and domestic abuse organisations are best placed to do this work and funding should be diverted away from new prison buildings and used to fund community provision.

Women in Prison HM Government Transforming the response to domestic abuse: supporting female offenders section (2018)	The document argues that domestic abuse is often a root cause of offending and that independent specialist women's advocacy and support are the lynchpin of support for women in contact with the criminal justice system. It recommends that strategic funding is needed based on existing gaps in provision and that a joined-up approach is needed to address the issue.
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### The Fawcett Society

Title	Summary
Keeping mum (2008)	The document provides details of a campaign that The Fawcett Society ran, together with Unite and Oxfam, to reduce mothers' poverty and calls for the government to address the financial disadvantages that impact on women when they become mothers.
Who has that? Women's perceptions of equality in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century (2012b)	'Who has that?' aims to understand how a range of women think and speak about equality, what it looks like and what it means to them in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century. The document was produced to sit alongside a video project with 8 women who were part of an ethnographic study.
Where are women's voices on the economy? (2015)	This document analyses the economic coverage in six national newspapers over the period of the general election campaign in 2015 and counted the number of references to a man or woman and the number of men or women quoted in relation to the economy. It identified that over 80% of quotes or references to the economy were from or to men. It calls for greater inclusion of women's voices or views on the economy in media coverage.
Where's the benefit? (Ariss et al., 2015)	'Where's the benefit?' is a report from an independent inquiry into the impact of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) on equality between women and men. It highlights that the JSA regime takes insufficient account of the distinctive circumstances of many women's lives, in particular their higher risk of getting stuck in low-paid jobs, the impact of their caring responsibilities and the fact that they are much more likely than men to be at risk of domestic and sexual violence. It also

	states that there is insufficient account for women being more vulnerable to sanctions through non-compliance with requirements due to circumstances outside of their control.
Exiting lockdown the impact on women (2020)	This report provides recommendations for government on how to safeguard the needs of women when planning for an exit from lockdown. It includes recommendations to improve test, track and trace, childcare provision, increases to child benefit and increased representation of women in decision-making.

**Appendix four: What's the problem represented to be? Example of document analysis**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Year of publication</b>	<b>Focus of document</b>
<b>The female offender strategy</b>	<b>2018</b>	Diversion of female offenders away from custodial sentences.
<b>What is the problem represented to be?</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not addressing the vulnerabilities of women offenders leads to unnecessary and costly custodial sentences, These in turn lead to higher re-offending rates and poor outcomes for women, society and their children.</li> <li>• Women who have offended are not 'productive citizens'.</li> <li>• Need more local provision for women.</li> </ul>		
<b>What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation? Are there gendered assumptions?</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual problems such as alcohol misuse are causes of issues for women who have offended.</li> <li>• Acknowledgement of domestic abuse as a factor but this is not explored at societal or structural level.</li> <li>• Women need support to access employment and housing and re-offending will drop. No acknowledgement of the difficulties of accessing employment. Some acknowledgement of housing difficulties.</li> <li>• Women as primary carers therefore responsible for intergenerational offending, no corresponding acknowledgement of women as primary carer as cause of the offending where for example, truancy, theft, TV licence.</li> <li>• Goal is to stop re-offending and be productive citizen rather than address underlying causes.</li> </ul>		

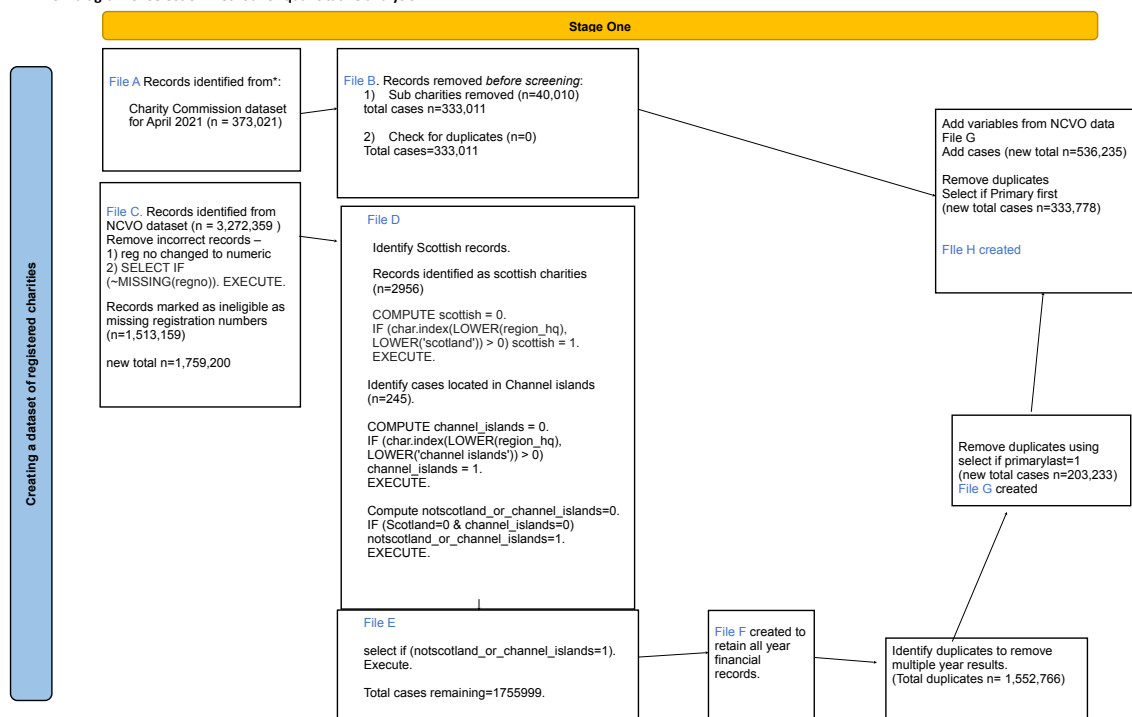
<b>How has this come about?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Corston report</li> <li>• Cost-saving - Womens centres and VCS as a form of (cheaper) support for women to prevent re-offending.</li> <li>• Problem is individual and by supporting the individual to address issues such as drug or alcohol misuse there will be a cost-saving from avoiding re-offending and custody and a positive impact for the family and society.</li> <li>• A productive citizen is the goal – a woman who has a house, a job and looks after their children.</li> </ul>
<b>What is left unproblematic? Can the problem be conceptualised differently?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No acknowledgment of wider structural issues e.g. if retail theft and TV licences are the biggest issues why is this the case?</li> <li>• If domestic abuse and mental health issues are important why not address cause of domestic abuse and associated links with poor mental health.</li> <li>• Short interventions that do not address these broader issues.</li> <li>• Capitalist model of productive citizen can be questioned.</li> </ul>
<b>What effects (discursive, subjective, lived) are produced by this representation of the problem?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the problem is conceptualised as an individual problem then solutions will be individualised as well.</li> <li>• Subjectification – failure of women to be productive. Women as carers responsible for intergenerational offending. Black and minoritized women and girls are acknowledged but not addressed in solutions.</li> <li>• Lived- support to access employment but very difficult to access and poor quality. Additional barriers for Black and minoritised women and girls not addressed.</li> </ul>



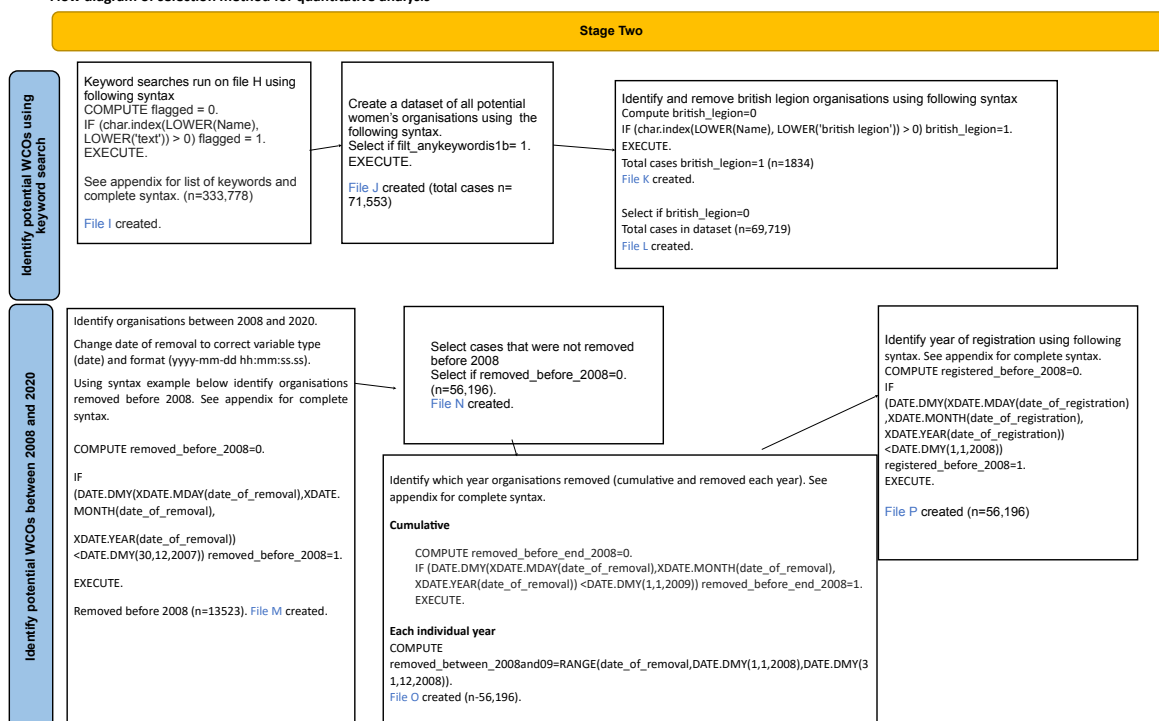
<b>How and where has this representation been produced, disseminated and defended?</b>
Government policy document setting direction for policy in relation to female offenders.
<b>How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structural issues not addressed.</li> <li>• “Supporting us to meet needs of women” – whose role to provide services?</li> </ul>
<b>Reflections</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implications for WGOs- cost saving role.</li> <li>• Some acknowledgement of importance of gendered approach and support. Mandated support versus voluntary engagement with services is problematic.</li> <li>• ‘Third sector network of womens services’</li> <li>• Implications for gender equality – WGOs as role in making productive citizens rather than addressing gender equality.</li> <li>• Short term solutions for structural issue.</li> </ul>

## Appendix five: Flowchart of quantitative data analysis

Flow diagram of selection method for quantitative analysis



Flow diagram of selection method for quantitative analysis



Flow diagram of selection method for quantitative analysis

