

‘We can’t fight in the dark’:
**Violence Against Women
and Girls (VAWG) among
Brazilians in London**

SHORT REPORT

2018

**Cathy McIlwaine
Yara Evans**

'We can't fight in the dark': **Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) among Brazilians in London**

SHORT REPORT



Funded by



Supported by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Supported by



Background and context

While research on the Latin American community in London and the UK is increasing as their visibility is growing (McIlwaine et al., 2011; McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016), many specific issues affecting particular groups within the wider community remain under-acknowledged and understudied. One of these is the incidence and nature of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) among Latin American women migrants, and especially among Brazilians who comprise the largest of the nationality groups. Although the various organisations who provide services for Latin American women are aware of the high incidence, there is a need for robust empirical evidence on the nature of VAWG among this group.

This report addresses this need and outlines the main findings from a project on VAWG among Brazilians in London and among women in Rio de Janeiro funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. Focusing here on the London case, this project explores service provision based on interviews with 12 providers (see Evans and McIlwaine, 2017), as well as a survey with 175 women, together with 25 in-depth interviews and 5 focus group discussions. The fieldwork was conducted in partnership with the Latin American Women's Rights Service. While the survey elicited a profile of Brazilian women who tend to be more established in the UK, more educated, more likely to work in more professional occupations and to be of white ethnic backgrounds than has been found for many Brazilians in London more widely, this has been complemented with testimonial interviews and focus group discussions with women from a wide range of different backgrounds.

VAWG AMONG BRAZILIAN WOMEN IN LONDON IS ALARMINGLY WIDESPREAD

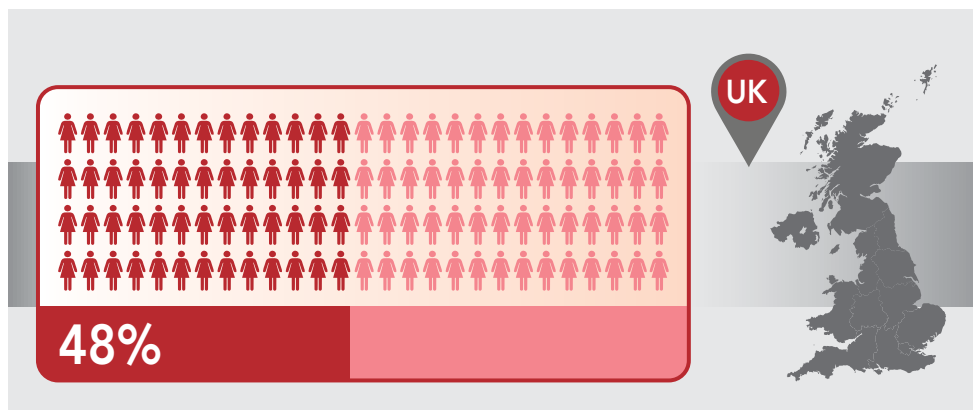
In terms of the **incidence and nature of VAWG** among Brazilian women in London, **the rates for all types of physical and non-physical violence are extremely high:**

- Four in every five women had experienced Gender-based Violence (GBV) in their lifetime (82%)¹

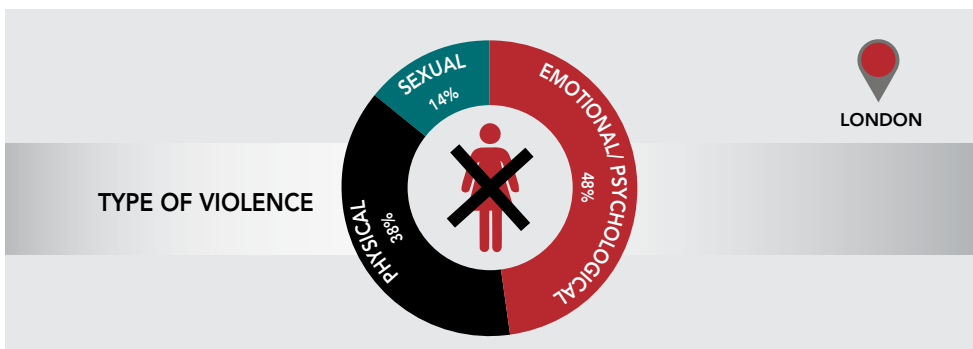


- Two in five had experienced it both in Brazil and in the UK, one third had experienced it only in Brazil with a small minority experiencing it only in the UK

- Nearly half (48%) of all women had experienced some form of GBV in the UK



- Emotional/psychological violence was the commonest type of violence experienced in London (48%), followed by physical violence (38%), with 14% experiencing sexual violence



¹ This must be contextualised within a global incidence of around one in three women experiencing GBV in their lifetime (UN Women, 2013).

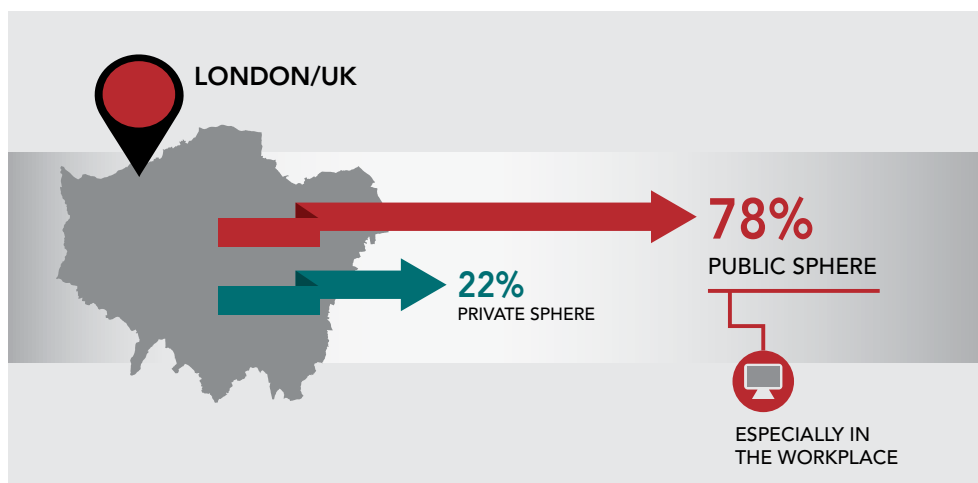
- Unwelcome physical contact was the commonest specific form of violence (experienced by 42%), followed by physical assault (36%), and being humiliated or suffering discrimination (33%)
- Women experienced diverse forms of violence in aggregate and over their lifetimes; one 40-year-old woman had experienced 22 different forms of gender-based violence over her lifecourse

In relation to the **perpetrators and places** where violence against women occurs in London, **VAWG is committed predominantly by men known to women and in the public sphere:**

- Two-thirds of VAWG was perpetrated by men known to women; almost a quarter was by an intimate partner (IP), whilst employers and colleagues in the workplace together accounted for over a quarter



- Most VAWG in London/UK was perpetrated in the public sphere (78%), especially in the workplace



There is a **diversity of different types** of domestic violence (DV):

- DV was widespread, diverse and likely to be carried out by an IP, especially sexual violence
- DV was often extremely severe; physically and sexually, it entailed injuries including broken bones, attacks with instruments such as knives as well as rape; emotionally, it involved long-term coercive control, repeated insults and attacks to self-esteem and financial manipulation

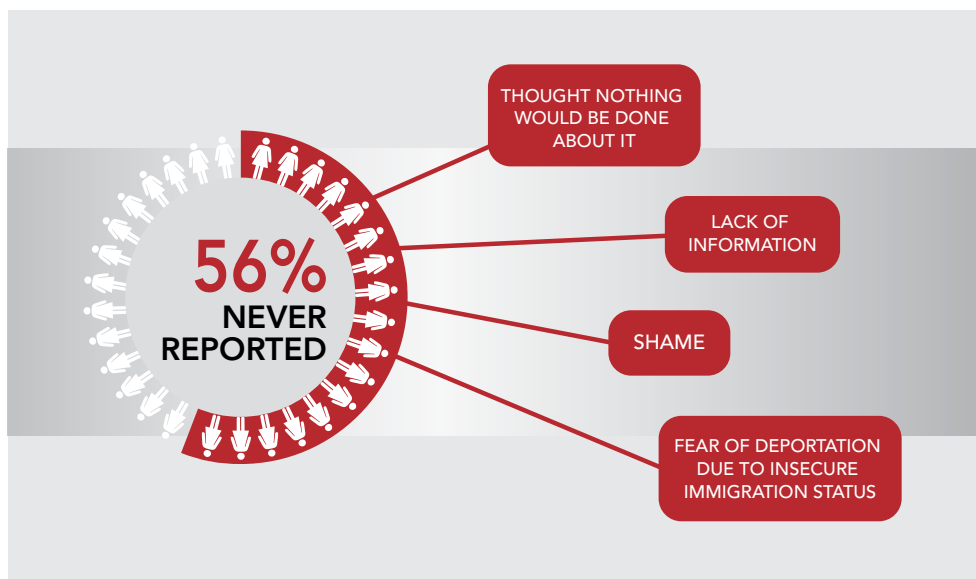
VAWG IS INTERSECTIONAL, ESPECIALLY AFFECTED BY IMMIGRATION STATUS

- VAWG is intersectional; women of mixed race were more likely to experience violence (63%) than white women (44%)
- Different immigration statuses can increase risk of VAWG; being subject to immigration control makes migrant women more vulnerable
- Women as migrants are more exposed to trafficking and forced labour

REPORTING VAWG AMONGST BRAZILIANS IN LONDON IS LIMITED AND HAMPERED BY LACK OF INFORMATION, SHAME, FEAR AND INSECURE IMMIGRATION STATUS

Reporting is affected by a range of different barriers including women not always being aware of what VAWG refers to, especially in relation to emotional/psychological violence. As a result, many are often made aware of VAWG indirectly through accessing other services.

- A majority (56%) of women never reported an episode of violence in London, mainly because they thought nothing would be done about it, lack of information, shame and fear of deportation due to insecure immigration status



- Among women who had reported a serious episode of violence, most had told their friends or the police
- Reporting to the police was mainly a negative experience, especially when women had irregular immigration status
- Women in their 40s, who had been in London for less than a year, were single and dependent on state benefits or on a partner's income were the least likely to seek help
- Lack of awareness about what constitutes VAWG delays help-seeking; many women only disclose when seeking help for other problems
- There is limited take up of services offered by organisations, but support by specialist organisations is vital for survivors of VAWG

VAWG IS A COMPLEX AND CUMULATIVE PROCESS OFTEN AFFECTED BY BRAZILIAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF VAWG BACK HOME IN BRAZIL

The majority of Brazilian women arrive in the UK with prior experiences of VAWG that subsequently affect their lives in London in multiplex ways. This included a range of harmful practices such as incestuous sexual abuse, forced abortions, forced marriage, honour based violence revolving around familial reputation.

- The vast majority of women experienced GBV in Brazil before migrating (77%)
- In Brazil, physical violence was the most common type experienced (42%), followed by emotional (36%), and sexual (22%)
- Individual women arrive in London with prior experiences of up to 20 different types of GBV perpetrated back home
- In Brazil, most perpetrators of VAWG were men known to women with most GBV occurring in the public sphere, especially the workplace
- Non-intimate partner VAWG in the home was more common than IP violence in Brazil, in contrast to London, and related with widespread incestuous sexual abuse by uncles, fathers and step-fathers which affected future relationships
- Most women in Brazil never reported VAWG because they thought nothing would be done about it, but those who had suffered a serious episode did report it, mostly to family and friends as well as the police
- Slightly more women think that VAWG in London occurs more or as frequently as in Brazil linked with social isolation, lack of English language skills and intersectional exploitation through hyper-sexualised stereotyping/gender discrimination experienced by migrants

- VAWG and international migration are interrelated in complex and transnational ways:



WHILE THE ROOT CAUSES OF VAWG ARE MISOGYNY AND PATRIARCHAL RELATIONS, CERTAIN FACTORS PLACE BRAZILIAN WOMEN AT GREATER RISK IN LONDON

The causes of VAWG are rooted in deep-seated patriarchal, misogynist relations that exist in Brazil and London. Although these transform as Brazilian women move, unequal gender ideologies often remain entrenched and provide the basis for the emergence of VAWG in London as men try to exert power over women. However, a range of risk factors also emerge, some which are legacies of life in Brazil, while others relate specifically to life as a migrant in London, whereas others are socio-demographic.²

- Different risk factors make VAWG more or less likely to occur in London
 - incestuous sexual abuse as a child
 - substance abuse
 - pregnancy and miscarriage
- Socio-demographic VAWG risk factors
 - London* > women were more likely to experience VAWG if they had lived in the city for between 10 and 20 years, were aged in their 40s, were educated to postgraduate level, were of mixed race rather than white, were separated or divorced, worked in the service sector and had access only to their own income.
 - Brazil* > women were more likely to experience VAWG if they were in their 20s, had secondary education, were of mixed race rather than white, were single, worked in service sector occupations, and had joint income with their partner.

² It is important to note that the ages that women experience VAWG in Brazil is affected by when they migrated and because most migrated aged between 21 and 30.

ADDRESSING AND PREVENTING VAWG AMONG BRAZILIAN WOMEN IN LONDON REQUIRES IMMEDIATE-, SHORT- AND LONG-TERM INTERVENTIONS THAT REVOLVE AROUND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT, EDUCATION AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF SOCIETY AS A WHOLE, INCLUDING MEN

Brazilian women suggest that VAWG needs to be addressed in the following ways across different time-frames:

- Psychological support is the most important short-term response and most commonly cited intervention to deal with VAWG
- Education is the most important long-term measure to prevent VAWG
- Society as a whole is perceived as responsible for eradicating VAWG by a quarter of women

Policy recommendations

INCREASED SAFE REPORTING:

- Safe reporting mechanisms ensuring migrant women victims of crime the ability to report safely (in their own language) to the police and other agencies including the NHS, local councils, social services, schools, etc. without fear of having their details shared with the Home Office for immigration control purposes, effectively establishing a firewall to protect victims' rights over immigration control.
- Safeguarding of migrants' personal data to ensure that victims of crime with insecure immigration status are able to report to the police, testify in court and access justice and other remedies.
- Inclusion of training module within police and employment enforcement agencies on the circumstances of migrant victims of crime, barriers to reporting and types of support required, to improve the identification of migrant victims.
- Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill to set standards for the protection of migrant victims' rights above immigration control.

SUPPORT TO ENABLE WOMEN TO EXIT VIOLENCE AND LEAD INDEPENDENT LIVES:

- Extension of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) provision to victims of DV to migrant women who are not dependant on UK nationals, especially in relation to difficulties in providing evidence to prove that DV occurred and the short three-month time frame permitted.
- Training for agency officials (including police, social services, schools, job centres, medical staff), on the circumstances of migrant women facing VAWG, barriers, needs and support available to increase the number of women in contact with agencies who are able to access support.
- Training for agencies on the impact of less known types of VAWG, including psychological violence/coercive control, financial abuse and honour based violence and their incidence in different communities.
- Appropriate resourcing of specialist VAWG services for migrant women, including casework support and legal advice on the different forms of violence, as well as counselling support in community languages via a commissioning model that is aware of BAMER and migrant women's need for longer term, holistic support, and of the importance of maintaining women only spaces to enable access.
- Resourcing of refuges, particularly BME women's refuges which have lost around half of their annual council funding between 2009 and 2016.
- Increased collaboration between agencies and governments and specialist VAWG providers and other non-governmental organisations combatting VAWG.

PREVENTION:

- Prevention work at schools, training for students, teachers and school staff on healthy relationships and on the signs of abuse, how to tackle it, etc.
- Specialist VAWG training and awareness raising campaigns in Portuguese, aimed at increasing understanding of VAWG and the legal options of victims in the Brazilian community.
- Outreach work aiming at raising awareness of the spectrum of VAWG and combating stigma, targeting Brazilian women.

OTHER:

- Central government to take the necessary steps for the appropriate implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the EU Victims Directive and CEDAW.
- Increased legal aid support to ensure that victims of VAWG are able to access justice regardless of migrant status.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for financial support for this project from the Economic and Social Research Council as part of the UK-Brazil Collaborative Research Call under the auspices of the Newton Fund and the Urban Transformations programme (grant number: ES/N013247/1). The co-investigator on the research was Paul Heritage from Queen Mary University of London with the following research partners in London: the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) and People's Palace Projects. This research is part of a larger project with other partners in London (CASA Latin American Theatre Festival), and in Rio de Janeiro as a partnership with Redes da Maré, led by Eliana Sousa Silva, and with the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, led by Miriam Krenzinger, with Rosana Morgado, Joana Garcia, Gisele Martins and Isabela Souza.

References

- Evans, Y. and Mcllwaine, C. (2017), *Supporting Brazilian Women in London: Service Provision for Survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)*, London, CASA/ESRC/LAWRS/PPP/QMUL/Redes/UFRJ/, <http://www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/media/geography/docs/research/Supporting-Brazilian-Women-in-London-Final-07-04-17.pdf>
- Mcllwaine, C., Cock, J. C., and Linneker, B. (2011) *No Longer Invisible: The Latin American Community in London* (London: Trust for London), <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/geography/people/academic/mcilwaine/reports/No-Longer-Invisible-full-report.pdf>; accessed 07/03/18.
- Mcllwaine, C. and Bunge, D. (2016), *Towards Visibility: the Latin American Community in London*, London, Trust for London, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/geography/people/academic/mcilwaine/reports/Towards-Visibility-full-report.pdf>; accessed 07/03/18.