



London Women's Census

Improving understanding of women's rough sleeping

Life Off The Streets women's workstream

With the support of London Councils, GLA, the Life Off the Streets Core Group and DLUHC

Women's Rough Sleeping Census

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Women's Rough Sleeping Census

The Life Off the Streets women's workstream is delivering a women's census which aims to better capture data about the extent of women's rough sleeping.

The census is being planned and coordinated by SHP, the Women's Development Unit and St Mungo's. This exercise has the support of London Councils, GLA, Life Off the Streets Core Group and DLUHC.

The Life Off the Streets Executive Board brings together partners key to tackling rough sleeping in London. It is jointly chaired by the Deputy Mayor for Housing and by London Councils. It is supported by the multi-agency Life Off the Streets Core Group which works to operationalise the programme's strategic objectives.

The Life Off the Streets women's workstream is a sub-group working to determine, drive and manage activities intended to ensure that rough sleeping is prevented for women – and where that fails that rough sleeping is a rare, brief and non-recurrent experience.

London Women's Census

Session outcomes

At the end of today's guidance session you will:

- Know how to undertake gender-informed outreach shifts as part of the London Women's Census 2022, with an understanding of how gender-informed shifts will differ to normal outreach shifts/street counts.
- Have an increased understanding of how and why women experience homelessness and multiple disadvantage differently to men.
- Have an increased understanding of how we can work towards trauma informed outreach practice when working with rough sleeping women.

Women's census 2022

The methodology used will differ from the normal snapshot count in recognition of the fact that women sleep rough less visibly and are less likely to come into contact with outreach teams as a result.

1. Outreach – Outreach services will be asked to deliver gender-informed outreach sessions using insight into where and when women more commonly rough sleep. Outreach will include at least one daytime shift during census week.

2. Survey - Services likely to encounter women who are rough sleeping (e.g. day centres, women's services, health services) will be asked to complete a simple, anonymised survey over a set period of a week to identify women who are rough sleeping. This will not include accommodation services.

3. Streetlink - We will ask Streetlink to support us with figures on number of calls relating to women reported as potentially rough sleeping over the census period.

Delivery date: across the full working week of **19th-23rd September 2022**

London Women's Census

Why a women's census

Women are under-represented in rough sleeping counts: there is increasing awareness that existing data on homelessness greatly underestimates the number of women experiencing homelessness and is not adapted to understand their realities.

Key data sources used to understand homelessness are obtained from observing those who are bedded down or about to bed down on a given night, which fails to capture women who, for reasons of safety, are more likely to be constantly 'on the move' than men, instead utilising more hidden locations such as public transport, A&E and 24-hour food establishments, particularly at night and who may also be engaging in sex work or survival sex.

Mechanisms to capture hidden, concealed and intermittent rough sleeping have not been explored.

This leads to a catch 22 – services continue to be shaped around the experiences and needs of clients more familiar to them: adult men, outreach not commissioned to work in a gender informed way, women remain hidden and without access to support to end homelessness, disadvantage become more entrenched, and the needs of women experiencing homelessness, continue to be overlooked in service design, policy and strategy.

London Women's Census

Aims of the census

We are aiming to gain a better picture of women who are rough sleeping in London. Our focus will be a gender-informed understanding of rough sleeping.

Our survey will aim to gain a picture of those who have been rough sleeping recently to account for the cyclical and sometimes intermittent nature of women's rough sleeping.

We hope the findings will tell us about the scale of hidden rough sleeping among women; services they have come into contact with prior to rough sleeping; and the needs of women. This data will help to increase understanding of women's experiences and inform future provision.

PraxisCollab researchers are supporting data collection, methodology and analysis of findings and we will produce a report to make the findings public.

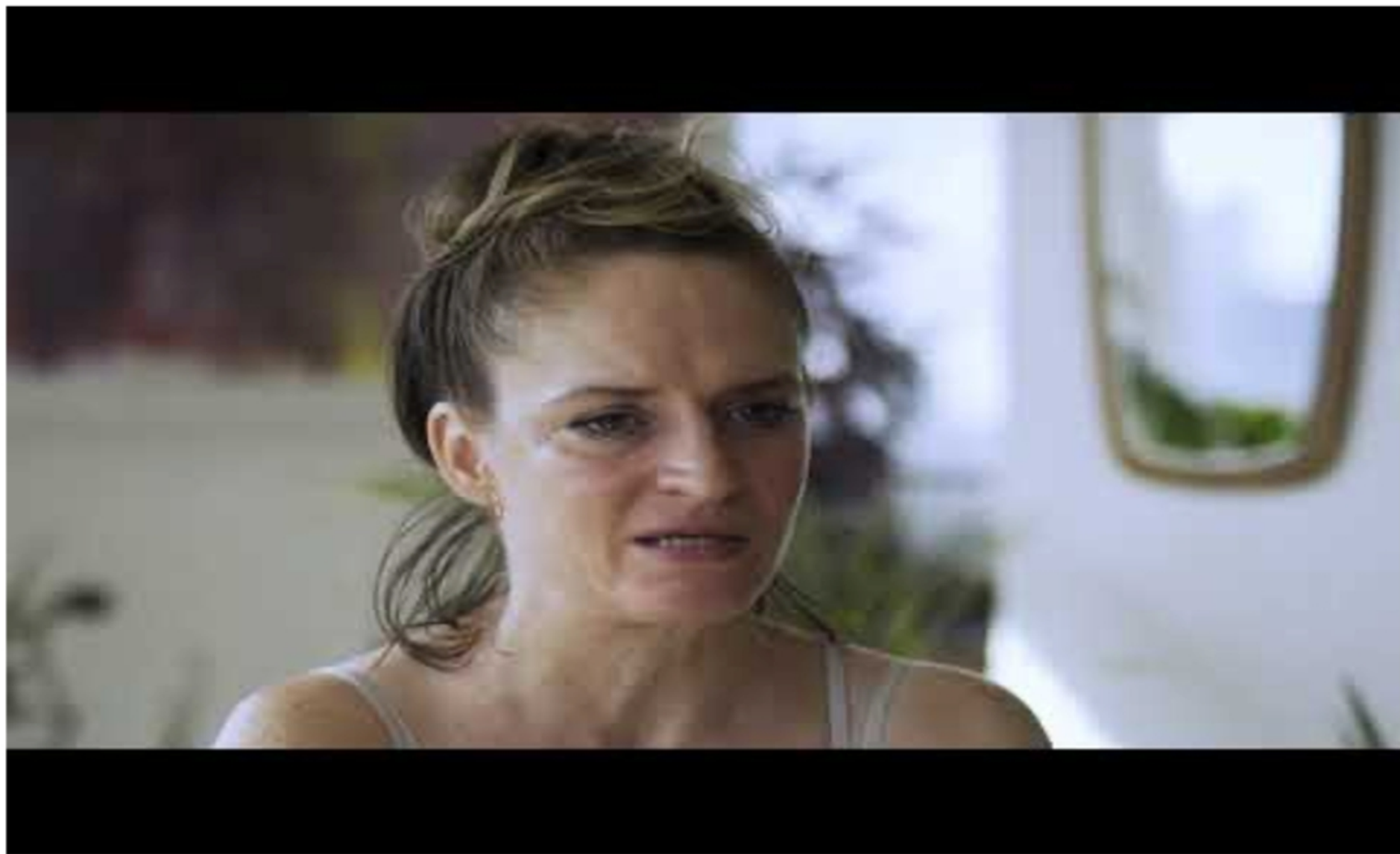
We've been working closely with PraxisCollab to achieve a balance between gathering the data needed on women's homelessness while ensuring this census is deliverable across London in its first iteration. We see this as a pilot census which we hope can be replicated and developed in future years.

London Women's Census

Why is this work needed?

The next slide contains an extract from SHP's video 'Hidden Homelessness: The experiences of women in Camden', which helps to demonstrate the need for this work.

This is a recording of women talking about their own experiences of rough sleeping and homelessness. Please be aware this video talks about experiences which can be difficult to hear about, and includes mention of sexual assault.



Women's homelessness

Women will visibly rough sleep as a last resort. They are more likely to be 'hidden homeless' in precarious living situations e.g.:

- Sofa surfing (within social network but also 'friend's of friend's' and strangers)
- Walking around all night, being constantly on the move
- Rough sleeping in more 'hidden' locations, A&Es, public transport and other 24hr establishments
- Engaging in survival sex/sex working
- Living with abusive partners
- Temporary accommodation
- Concealing their gender whilst rough sleeping
- Alternating between some/all of the above

Presumptions are often made about women being more willing to access support than men, however women experiencing homelessness are less likely than their male counterparts to seek out formal support.

Women's homelessness and gender-based violence

- 'Near universal' experiences of domestic abuse (bi-directional link)
- Violence from other homeless people, predominantly men
- Physical and verbal abuse from the general public, including police officers and security guards
- Sexual harassment and predatory behaviour from men, with assumptions made around sex working
- Sexual violence and rape
- Violence experienced through sex working
- Increased risk of sexual exploitation and harm when sofa surfing/ insecurely housed
- Women's reports of engaging in transactional or survival sex for a place to stay
- Exploitative street-based relationships
- Coerced drug use

Women's homelessness and gender-based violence

Recurring themes from qualitative research carried out with homeless women:

- Women describe feeling vulnerable, scared, and constantly at risk of violence while homeless
 - Perception that they need to form relationships with men for protection when rough sleeping
 - Experiencing mixed-gender services and accommodation as unsafe, particularly due to risk of sexual violence, sexual harassment and exploitation in male dominated services and spaces
- In 2021 the Centre for Homelessness Impact noted: **'few generic homelessness services are truly gender-informed and thereby equipped to provide sensitive and appropriate housing and support to women'**.

London Women's Census

Women's homelessness and motherhood

- Women tend to have more regular caring responsibilities than men and are more likely to define their lives in relation to their homes and children
- Many homeless women who are categorised as 'single' and are supported by services for 'single' people are, in fact, mothers, whose children are temporarily or permanently in the care of others.
- Survey in 2016 indicated that half of the women St. Mungo's work with are mothers, and 79% of these mothers have had children taken into care.
- Maternal status of the women became invisible once they lived apart from their children
- Separation from children is another example of trauma, affecting women's mental health and substance use.
- Few services are able to provide specialist support in this area.

Women's homelessness and health

- Rates of poor mental health higher amongst women, who are more likely to cite mental health issues as a cause or contributor to their homelessness
- Links between symptoms of trauma and mental ill-health - PTSD, anxiety, depression, self-harm, eating disorders and personality disorders.
- Role of gender-stereotyping and stigma towards homeless women, impacts on emotional wellbeing and sense of self-worth
- Women report feelings of shame as a barrier to having their health needs met
- Services often overlook additional health needs women may have – contraception, access to terminations, pregnancy, menopause
- **Lower average age of death:** In 2020, the average age of death for a woman experiencing homelessness was 41.6 (45.9 for men). – inverse relationship for the general public where life expectancy for women is consistently higher than for men.

Trauma-informed outreach

Trauma can be a single experience or many repeated experiences where a person's self-preservation was, or perceived to be, threatened and they felt helpless, frightened and alone. Trauma is a painful, disturbing and overwhelming experience.

The adverse impact of repeated trauma is further exacerbated if what's causing the trauma is abuse from a person or persons who the individual is supposed to trust

Repeated traumatic events can lead to **complex trauma**, leading to difficulties regulating emotions, feelings of shame or guilt, experiencing intense feeling of loneliness, risky or destructive behaviour, significant difficulties in building and maintaining relationships with others and altered sense of self.

Trauma-informed outreach

Why should our outreach practice be trauma informed?

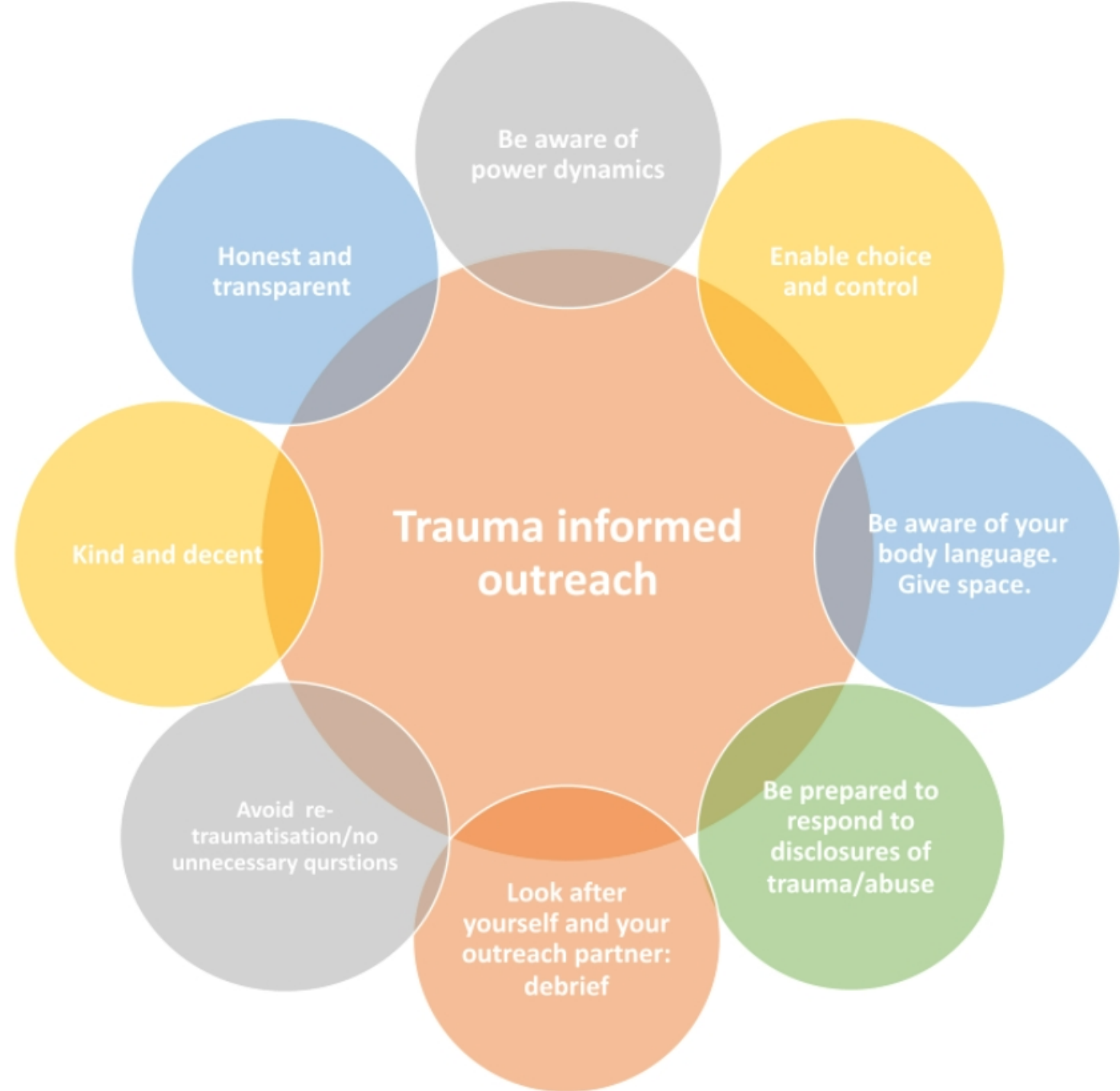
Every interaction with a person who has experienced trauma is an opportunity to offer a reparative, trauma-informed response.

Research indicates that women who experience multiple disadvantage benefit from relational-based support which prioritises emotional safety, relationship-building, choice and control.

Relational repair work - offering service users a different experience of relationships – safety rather than feeling threatened, choice rather than being controlled, collaboration over coercion & trust rather than betrayal

Offering a trauma-informed response increases inclusion, safety and is an effective way to work.

What does trauma informed outreach look like?



Methodology - Outreach

The census is composed of different elements – gender-informed outreach, a survey for non-outreach services to conduct, and aggregate numerical data from Streetlink and Housing Options.

This session will focus on the gender-informed outreach.

Outreach

- We are asking rough sleeping leads in every borough to support outreach teams to deliver daytime outreach during the week. Outreach teams can check if your rough sleeping lead and managers have confirmed the borough's involvement.
- Outreach teams will complete a simple survey with women they see during the shift, via a link provided.
- We have produced guidance for outreach teams to use to plan your shift, which this training will now go through.

Who and when?

Who?

- Those on the outreach shift should go out in pairs – each pair should contain at least one outreach worker and one female worker or volunteer.
- Outreach workers should be from the borough's outreach team: please let us know if you will be in a borough you don't usually cover so we can ensure any CHAIN recording is done for the right borough.

When?

- Each borough should conduct a minimum of 6 hours of gender-informed outreach, across one day, covering the whole borough.
- Your shift should take place between the hours of 7am and 7pm.
- We will provide a form in which to record how your shift was delivered (times, staff numbers etc), for research purposes.
- If your team can do additional shifts during the week, you are welcome to do so within the same gender-informed framework, but please record any additional shifts on the form.

Where?

Where?

- Each borough should map out their shift using the team's local intelligence and that of local services to identify areas women are more likely to frequent or use during the day.
- Make sure your borough is comprehensively canvassed. If you usually do this for annual snapshot counts by planning patches or specific routes and you intend to use these for this shift, make sure they are carefully reconsidered and adjusted to hotspots most likely to be used by women.

In addition to normal outreach routes and 'hotspots' for rough sleeping/street activity, gender-informed outreach shifts should also go to:

- Quieter streets, car parks, parks/green spaces - areas where women could be concealed rough sleeping/sheltering
- Inside train/tube/bus stations including toilets, inside libraries, McDonald's/Burger Kings etc (including toilets), A&E waiting rooms
- Around soup kitchens/inside churches or other places of worship which may provide shelter
- Around homeless health services – GPs, mental health drop in, substance use drop ins
- Around day centres and hostels (where women may not be living but may have reason to go to/be near)

London Women's Census

Who should you approach?

- The methodology of this census recognises that women who are rough sleeping may not be physically bedded down in a sleeping bag. We aim to reach out to a broader range of women whose rough sleeping patterns and circumstances may look different.
- The outreach survey and shift should include women who are not bedded down and who may be using spaces which would not typically be recorded on annual snapshots/counts.
- Outreach workers should use their professional judgement, insights from volunteers and the examples in the guidance to help establish who to approach, e.g. women who are engaged in any form of street activity, women in enclosed and retail spaces (e.g. train stations, fast food outlets) and may be sheltering there or have a number of belongings with them.
- To note: women's rough sleeping can be complicated and often not linear – for example, women may have a hostel bed space but spend some time sleeping rough with a partner, because they feel unsafe in the hostel or for other reasons. They may even have their own tenancy but not feel able to return to it due to certain risks or other reasons. Some women may be alternating between rough sleeping and other forms of homelessness or insecure housing e.g. sofa surfing, or staying with a dangerous partner.

Who should you approach?

- The survey will include introductory text and will ask a clear, clarifying question of all women so it is clear whether or not the survey is relevant for them, so outreach workers will not need to determine someone's exact circumstances in order to proceed.
- We appreciate that outreach pairs will be keen not to embarrass anyone they approach, for example if they aren't homeless or don't wish to be seen as homeless. Outreach workers are likely to have experience in this, but we suggest workers could talk more generally about your organisation's work (e.g. we work for an organisation which provides housing support), or about the survey more generally (e.g. we are conducting a survey about women's homelessness today), to start the conversation, following up with the survey's introductory text about rough sleeping.

What will the survey ask?

- The survey link will be sent to outreach teams just before census week. Outreach pairs can complete this simple survey via a phone or tablet.
- Workers will be given a written explanation of the intention of the research to read through or hand out to women you are discussing the survey with.
- Taking part in the census is entirely voluntary and there will be no identifying questions.
- If the survey is relevant for her and she wants to take part, she can be offered a £5 voucher for her time (provided in advance to outreach workers by the census team).

Survey themes include:

- Age on last birthday (this will not record DOB)
- Where they stayed the previous night
- Ethnicity
- Duration and frequency of homelessness
- Sex and gender
- Services they are accessing
- Whether they have already been asked these questions by someone else this week

CHAIN

- Please read the guidance carefully to understand the procedures around recording on CHAIN.
- There will be a women's census feature on CHAIN which can be used to record:
 - Bedded down street contacts for all women they see sleeping rough
 - Non-bedded down contacts for women not seen sleeping rough but engaged in street activity.
- The distinction between information taken for CHAIN purposes and information taken for via the survey should be made clear to ensure any women taking part are aware of where their information is being recorded and how it will be used.

Other considerations:

- We have developed a template for outreach teams to use to create information packs for women you meet who may need signposting for support – you can find these on the website, please fill these out with local information for your borough.
- In addition to the voucher, outreach teams may wish to take out small care packages for women they encounter on shift. The census team is working on getting some donations to distribute to support with this.
- Make use of language line and volunteers with language skills

Safeguarding

- It is important that all outreach pairs are prepared
- Women under 18 should not be included in this survey: if you meet a woman under 18 and are concerned she is rough sleeping or at other high risk, follow usual safeguarding procedures.
- If you meet a woman who is pregnant and rough sleeping, please again follow usual safeguarding and support procedures. She can be included on the survey, but her safety is paramount.
- Women in very poor health or at very high health risk may need urgent support. Please contact your local health teams and numbers, as well as emergency services as required.
- For women who are in immediate danger or risk of harm, discuss some basic safety planning with her (see next slide) or contact support services if she is willing to do so and appropriate.

As on any count or shift, the safety of those you meet and of the workers and volunteers on shift is of the most importance.

Safety planning

Risk assesses - Is she at imminent risk from someone? Does she need medical attention?

Basic safety planning – *if safe and appropriate to do so*

E.g. “We know that being on the streets can be incredibly frightening for women so we check in with all our female clients about how they manage their safety day to day”

- Identify and validate existing strategies she is using to manage her safety
- Is there anywhere you go to feel safer?
- Is there anywhere you avoid?
- Is there anyone you contact when you're feeling unsafe?
- Is there anyone you avoid?
- If she has accommodation, is she safe there?
- Does she know where to go/who to go/who to call to or access help and support if she needs to?
- What does her existing support network look like?

Safety planning

- Identify safe spaces the client can go to if she feels unsafe (and consider a range of options), women's only services, drop in centres/services, day centres, No Second Night Out assessment centre, libraries, 24hr establishments, A&E
- Can you support her to get to a safe place?
- Can you offer anything practical to increase her safety e.g. mobile phone, phone credit, personal alarm?
- Does she want to report to the police?
- If you are arranging accommodation, consider how safe is it for women?
- Offer practical support to meet immediate needs
- What appropriate referrals do you need to make?

- Guidance for safety planning with women experiencing multiple disadvantage - Keeping us Safer: <https://www.mungos.org/app/uploads/2021/06/Keeping-Us-Safer.pdf>
- Guidance on working with couples: <https://www.shp.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=8c5c9961-8e2d-41f1-8564-88e23f1b048c>
- Safety advice for sex workers in the UK: <https://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/Keeping%20Safe%20-%20Safety%20advice%20for%20sex%20workers%20in%20the%20UK.pdf>

Safety planning

Do

- Make third party reports if you witness someone being assaulted
- Acknowledge the complexity of working with couples – there are no hard and fast rules - use your judgement
- Engage with partners if it helps the women to be able to engage – one worker from each of the couples
- Be open, and supportive in your approach e.g. How are you? How can I support you? Can we talk about what happened — when/where would be good for you?

Don't

- Use judgemental language and assumptions e.g. Why haven't you used your bedspace? Why didn't you call the police/tell staff when it happened?
- Make assumptions about how she is feeling (or why) - ask yourself 'has she said/indicated this or is this coming from me?'
- Tell her or imply she needs to leave an abusive relationship
- Offer conditional support or withdraw services based on your views of what she should do

Safe outreach working practices

- Safe words
- Be aware of impact of hearing traumatic things from clients, can impact anyone on the shift, don't make assumptions. That impact might also differ widely from person to person.
- Be conscious of your volunteers
- Debrief after the shift

What next?

- Plan your shift with your team, get local intelligence from other services about which hotspots to go to.
- Let us know your volunteering needs.
- Get in touch with your volunteer/s if you've been matched up.
- Fill in your information packs to make them borough-specific and create care packs if applicable.
- Conduct your gender-informed outreach shift!
- Fill in the recording form about your census shift plans and make sure all surveys are submitted at the time of filling in.
- After the shift, we may approach some outreach teams to conduct informal interviews about the census and any patterns you noticed on shift.

Contacts and information

Sign up to our mailing list to make sure you receive the latest information: <https://forms.office.com/r/Dfkey1UUiE>

Find the latest information at <https://www.connection-at-stmartins.org.uk/womens-census/>

Contact us for more information and to get involved at womens.census@cstm.org.uk

Additional contacts:

- **Eleanor Greenhalgh**, Women's Development Unit Manager, Solace Women's Aid and The Connection at St Martin's
 - e.greenhalgh@solacewomensaid.org
- **Lucy Campbell**, Head of Multiple Disadvantage - Service Transformation, SHP
 - lcampbell@shp.org.uk
- **Steph Ratcliffe**, Head of Migrant and Advice Services, St Mungo's
 - stephanie.ratcliffe@mungos.org

London Women's Census

Who can help?

- **National Domestic Abuse Helpline**, 24/7: 0808 2000 247
- **Ascent Domestic Abuse Advice Helplines**: West London (WGN) 0808 801 0660; East London (Solace) 0808 802 5565
- **Rape Crisis**: East London Rape Crisis (Nia) - 0800 160 1036; West London Rape Crisis Centre (Women and Girls Network) - 0808 801 0770; South London Rape Crisis (Croydon RASASC) - 0808 802 9999; North London Rape Crisis (Solace Women's Aid) - 0808 801 0305
- **SignHealth** – Text 121SIGN to 88802 – domestic abuse advice and support for Deaf adults and young people.
- **Galop LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline**: 0800 999 5428
- **Men's Advice Line**: 0808 801 0327
- **Support for perpetrators**: Respect Phonenumber, 0808 802 4040