ENCOMPASS SNAPSHOT BRIEFING 2024

Snapshot background

Over the month of October 2024, five specialist organisations that are part of the Encompass Network supported **78 women** who have been involved in selling or exchanging sex or images.

The Encompass Network consists of seven organisations supporting women affected by commercial sexual exploitation (CSE):

- Another Way (Edinburgh)
- Routes Out (Glasgow)
- ViceVersa (Dundee)
- Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (Perth & Kinross)
- Cyrenians (Aberdeen)
- Alcohol & Drug Action (Aberdeen)
- Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance (TARA; national).

This snapshot provides information about key characteristics, needs, and experiences of the supported women in CSE.

The Encompass Network also developed an additional report exploring the context related to women's support needs and specialist services. You can read it **HERE**

A note on data collection. The nature of women's experiences and engagement with services posed challenges for complete data collection. Some women received only brief crisis support, which limited the opportunity to gather detailed information. As for long-term support, it relies on building trust, which allows women to share their experiences gradually. Additionally, some women used different names to protect their anonymity.

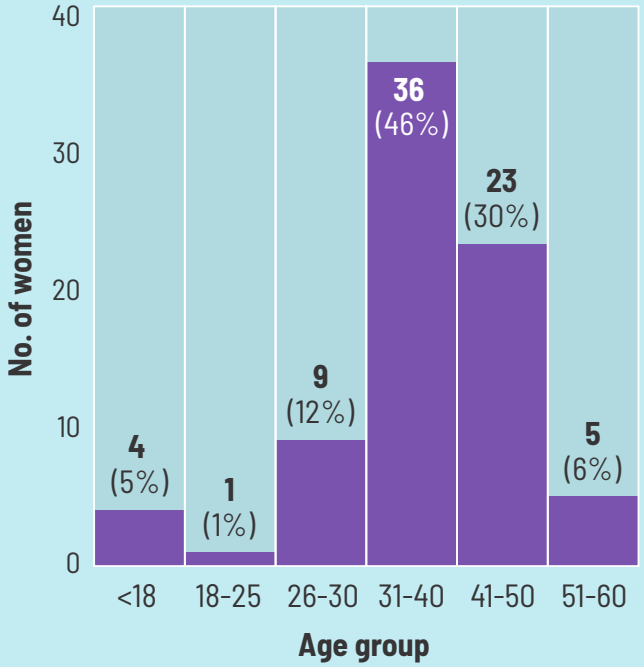
1. LENGTH OF SUPPORT

The majority of women (72%) have accessed the specialist service within the last 3 years. However, some women have been supported for up to 20 or more years.

Length of support	% of women
Under 1 year	**45%**
1 year	**17%**
2 years	**10%**
3 years	**1%**
4 years	**6%**
5 years	**8%**
6 years	**4%**
7 years	**3%**
12 years	**1%**
22 years	**4%**
24 years	**1%**

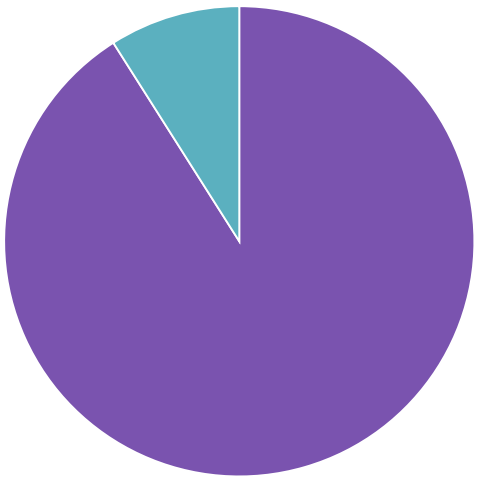
2. AGE RANGE

The majority of supported women (46%) were between the ages of 31 and 40, followed by the 41-50 age group (30%).



3. NATIONALITY AND ETHNICITY

3.1 Nationality



British nationals **91%** (71 women)

Non-British nationals **9%** (7 women)

3.2 Ethnicity

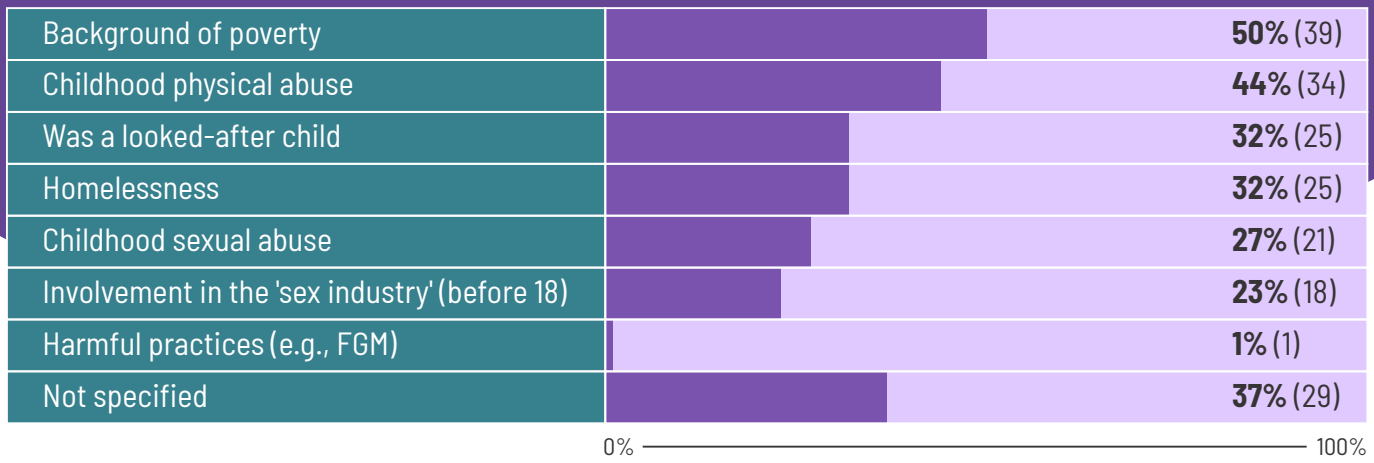
Ethnicity	No. of women
White British	**65** (83%)
Black British	**2** (3%)
Asian British	**1** (1%)
Black African	**2** (3%)
White European	**2** (3%)
White Other	**2** (3%)
Multiple ethnic background	**1** (1%)
Not given	**3** (4%)

4. ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

The most common adverse childhood experiences reported by supported women were poverty, physical abuse, experiences of local authority care, and homelessness.

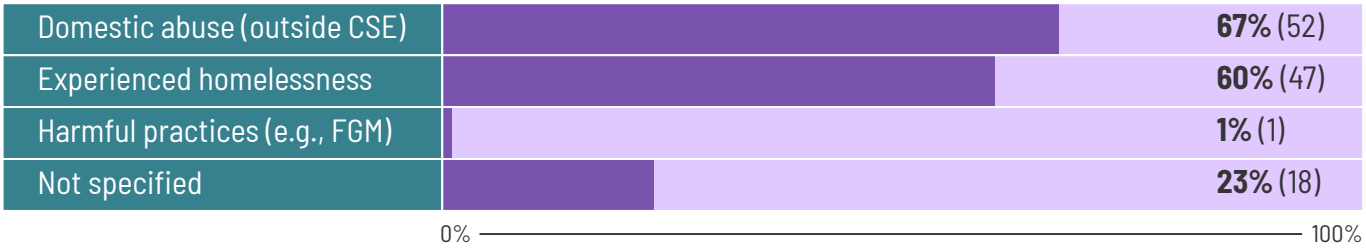
For 29 women, the background information was not available at the time of data collection and was classified as 'not specified.' This includes 11 women engaged in street-based outreach.

Percentage (and number) of women with adverse childhood experiences



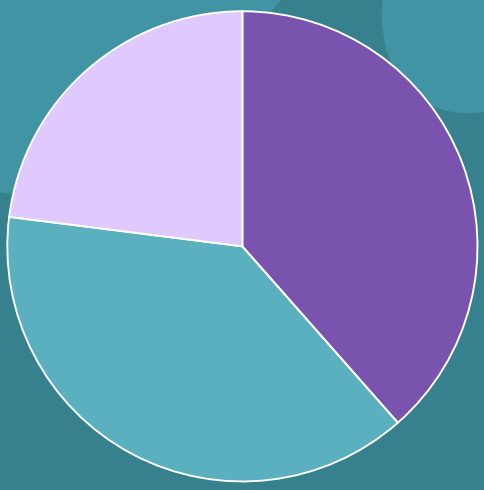
5. ADULTHOOD EXPERIENCES

Percentage (and number) of women with adult experiences



6. MOTHERHOOD

Do supported women have children?



Yes	38.5% (30)
No	38.5% (30)
Not known	23% (18)

Of 30 women who had children, 25 mothers (83%) had their children removed. This affected at least 37 children. This highlights the impact of loss on women, the importance of specialist services, and the barriers women face sharing information with support organisations. It is also important to emphasise that a woman's involvement in the 'sex industry' does not necessarily raise concerns for child protection.

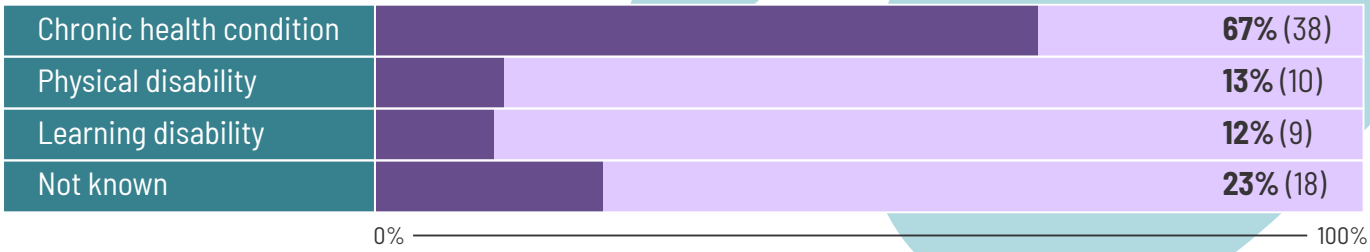
No. of children removed	No. of women
1 child	9
2 children	10
3 children	1
5 children	1
Not specified	4

83%
of women had their children removed

7. WOMEN'S HEALTH

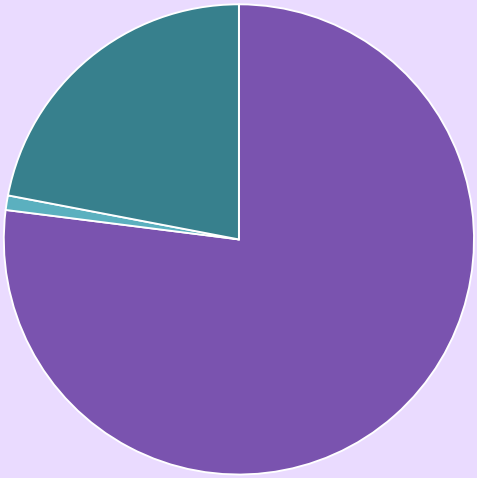
7.1 Physical health

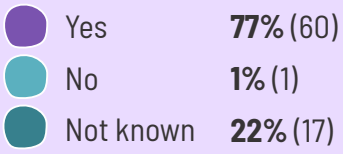
Percentage (and number) of women with a condition or disability



7.2 Mental health

Have women experienced mental health issues?





The support staff most commonly mentioned the mental health effects of **anxiety, depression, PTSD, and C-PTSD**. However, systematic data was collected on three specific mental health impacts: **feelings of shame, suicidal ideation or attempts within the last five years, and self-harm within the last five years**.

The table below displays the total numbers, comparative percentages of women known to experience these mental health impacts, and the relative percentages for all supported women.

Mental health impacts	**No. of women** (out of 60 women known to have mental health concerns)	**No. of women** (out of all 78 women)
Feelings of shame	**36** (60%)	**36** (46%)
Suicide ideation or attempt	**32** (53%)	**32** (41%)
Self-harm	**20** (33%)	**20** (26%)
Not known	N/A	**17** (22%)

7.3 Substance use

Out of 78 supported women, 64 (82%) were using substances. As for the further data breakdown, please note that information is not known about 18 (23%) women; therefore, the number of poly-substance and alcohol use is likely to be higher.

82%
of women were using substances

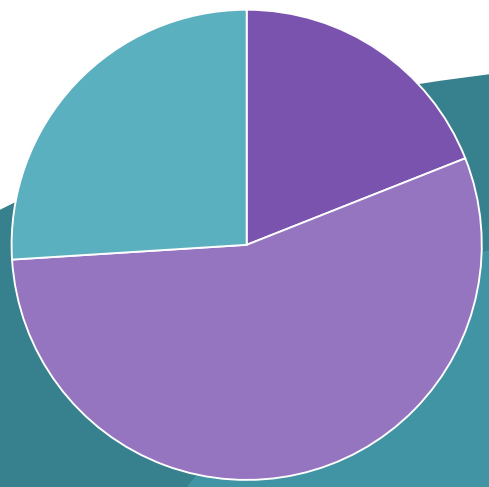
Percentage (and number) of women who were using substances

*Not known: **23%** (18)

8. EXPERIENCES OF COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

8.1 Organised crime

Do women have any links to organised crime?



Yes	**19%** (15)
No	**55%** (43)
Not known	**26%** (20)

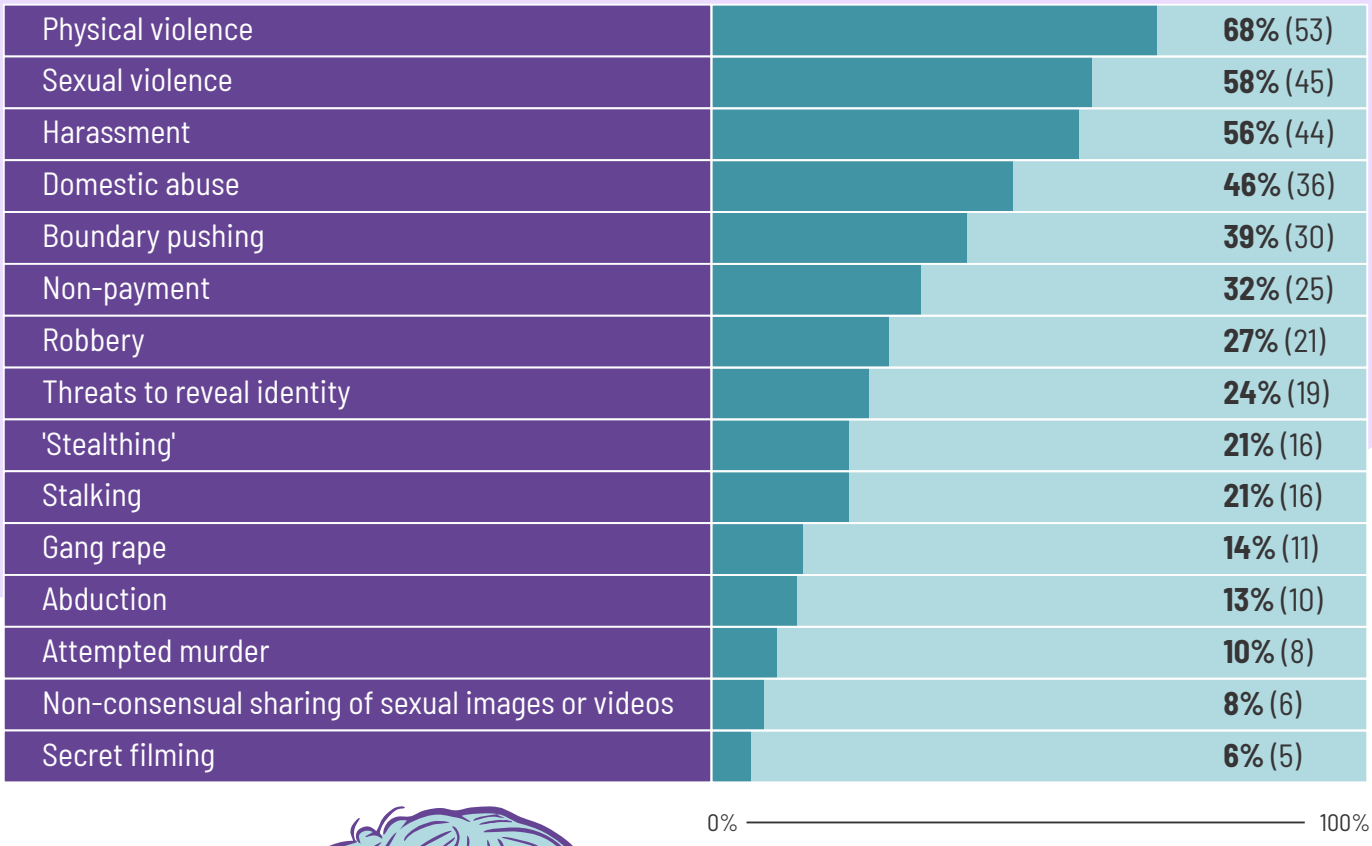
8.2 Experienced harms

60 supported women (81%) reported experiences of violence or other forms of harm related to their involvement in the 'sex industry'. The remaining 18 women (19%) had unknown experiences documented during data collection. In other words, no women were reported to have **not** experienced harm.

The most common harms reported were interpersonal, primarily taking the form of gender-based violence. On average, each woman experienced **5.6 different types of harms.**

The chart below lists different harms and the percentage of women within each category.

Percentage (and number) of women who have experienced harm



Please note that the given percentages do not total 100% as the majority of women experienced several harms.

8.2.1 Reports to police

The table below provides information on the reported harm to the police. The second column lists the percentages of 60 supported women known to have experienced at least one harm. The third column specifies the relative percentage for the given category (for example, how many women reported physical abuse that they encountered).

There is a relationship between the four most experienced and reported harms; however, out of 60 women known to have experienced harm, only 35 (58%) had made at least one report, with 24 women (40%) reporting none. The data is unspecified for 19 women (24%). On average, women **reported 3 harms**. Notably, none of the supported women reported 'stealthing' (non-consensual condom removal).

Reported harm	**No. of women** (out of all 78 women)	**No. of women** (out of all women to have experienced a specific harm)
Physical violence	**27** (45%)	**27/53** (51%)
Sexual violence	**22** (28%)	**22/45** (49%)
Domestic abuse	**16** (27%)	**16/36** (44%)
Harassment	**14** (23%)	**14/44** (32%)
Attempted murder	**6** (10%)	**6/8** (75%)
Stalking	**6** (10%)	**6/15** (37.5%)
Non-payment	**5** (8%)	**5/25** (20%)
Gang rape	**5** (8%)	**5/11** (46%)
Non-consensual sharing of sexual images or videos	**4** (7%)	**4/6** (67%)
Abduction	**4** (7%)	**4/10** (40%)
Robbery	**3** (5%)	**3/21** (14%)
Secret filming	**3** (5%)	**3/5** (60%)
Threats to reveal identity	**2** (3%)	**2/19** (11%)
'Stealthing'	**0** (0%)	**0/16** (0%)

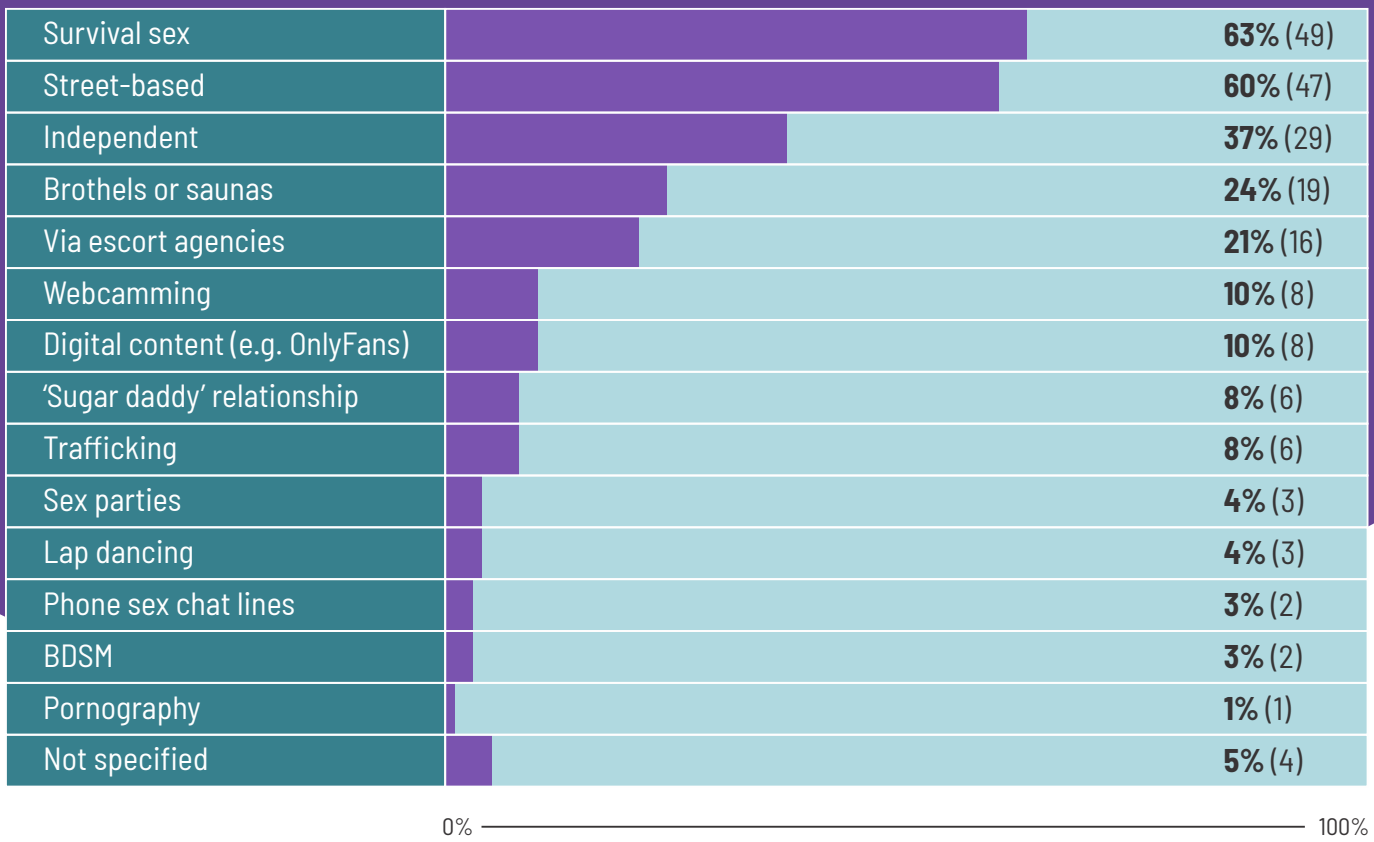
Please note that the given percentages do not total 100% as the majority of women experienced several harms.

8.3 'Sex industry' settings

Women were often involved in multiple contexts of the 'sex industry,' with the three most common being **survival sex***, **on-street**, and **independent** (in- and out-calls).

Please note that the numbers below include 11 women selling sex on-street; however, information about them was minimal at the time of data collection, and it is unknown whether they engaged in other settings.

Percentage (and number) of women in 'sex industry' settings

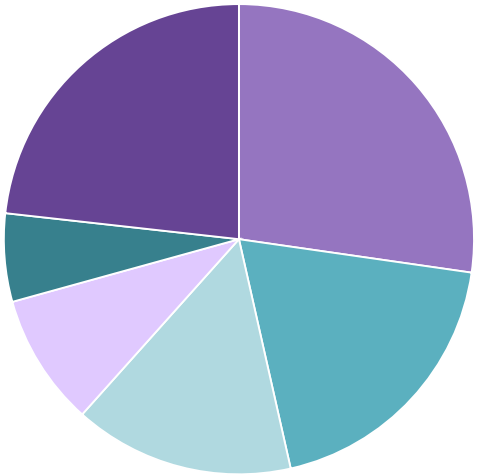


**Survival sex refers to the exchange of sexual activity for basic needs such as accommodation, food, travel or substances.*

8.4 Exiting

Most women (41; 53%) indicated that they wanted to stop selling sex, were taking steps to do so, or had already left the 'sex industry'. It is worth highlighting that 15 women (19%) could not stop.

What are women's experiences of exiting the 'sex industry'?



Has exited	**27%** (21)
Expressed wish to exit but is unable to stop	**19%** (15)
Does not want to or has no plans to exit	**15%** (12)
Exited in the past but has returned	**9%** (7)
In the process of exiting	**6%** (5)
Unknown	**23%** (18)

The mentioned barriers show that exiting is a complex process as women often face individual, relational, and structural challenges. The most common encountered issues were:

- The lack of financial alternatives
- Substance use
- Mental health concerns
- Pressures by others, including their partner, family members, and other women in the 'sex industry'
- Living in an area known for selling sex
- Social isolation
- Uncertainty about the future.

> "There were no barriers from the woman's end; however, the man she had the arrangement with would persistently harass her to try to prevent her exit."
>
> Woman's Worker, Encompass Network

9. SUPPORT NEEDS

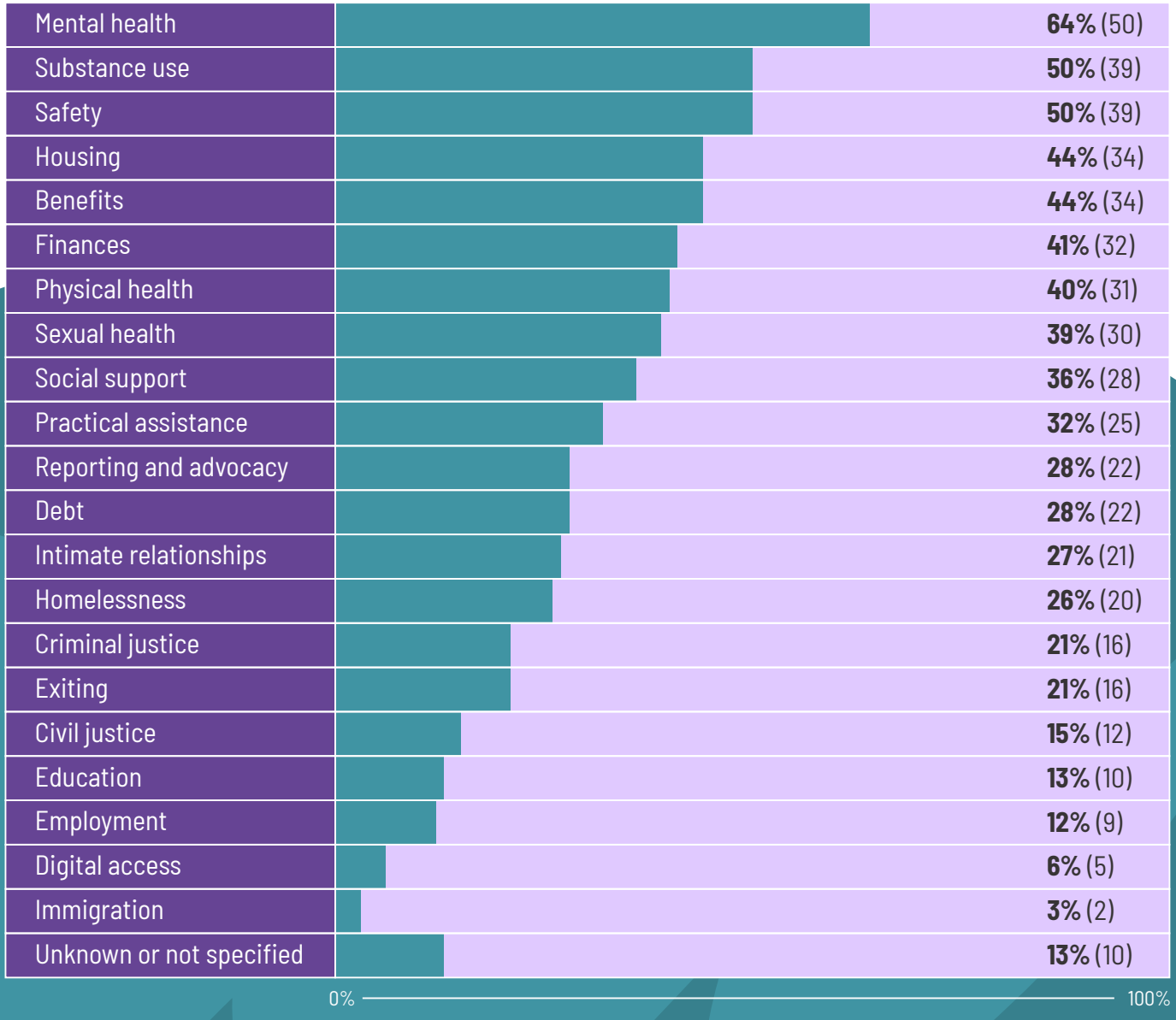
9.1 Support needs

The vast majority of women had more than one support need, with the highest number being 17. On average, women had **7 support needs**.

The information about support needs cannot be adequately compared with the previous Encompass Snapshots as the cohort of supported women was different (see here, here, and here).

However, it is worth pointing out that to a large extent, the following key themes remained similar: mental health, safety, substance use, housing, and finance-related support.

Percentage (and number) of women who have support needs



Please note that the given percentages do not total 100% as the majority of women had several support needs.

9.2 Agencies contacted

Agency	No. of women
Mental health	**35** (45%)
Housing	**29** (37%)
Substance use	**27** (35%)
GP	**25** (32%)
Finances	**24** (31%)
DWP	**23** (30%)
Food banks	**19** (24%)
Homelessness	**19** (24%)
Police	**17** (22%)
Sexual health	**16** (21%)
Debt	**13** (17%)
Adult social work	**10** (13%)

Agency	No. of women
Community justice	**9** (12%)
Welfare rights	**9** (12%)
Legal services	**8** (10%)
VAWG* services	**5** (6%)
Children & families social work	**4** (5%)
Education	**3** (4%)
Maternity	**2** (3%)
Immigration lawyers	**1** (1%)
Home Office	**1** (1%)
Career and employment advice	**1** (1%)
No contact or not specified	**27** (35%)

Please note that the given percentages do not total 100% as several agencies were contacted in many cases.
** Violence against women and girls*

ENCOMPASS

For more information on the work of the Encompass Network: www.encompassnetwork.info

WOMEN'S SUPPORT PROJECT

The Encompass Network is managed on behalf of the participating organisations by the Women's Support Project, a limited company registered in Scotland. Registration number SC323918 and Scottish charity number SC021846.

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