

Finding the Costs of Freedom

How women and children rebuild their
lives after domestic violence



solace
women's
aid



Finding the Costs of Freedom



How women and children rebuild
their lives after domestic violence

Liz Kelly, Nicola Sharp
and Renate Klein



Why this study



- ◆ We know a lot about crisis interventions
- ◆ We know virtually nothing about the process of rebuilding lives
- ◆ Women's organisations have lacked the resources to follow up service users
- ◆ Big Lottery Research Grants Programme enabled the link between Solace and CWASU

Objectives



- ◆ To explore domestic violence as survivors experience it – as a pattern of coercive control
- ◆ To track the process of rebuilding lives looking at the role of specialist support services, statutory agencies and informal support networks (family, friends, neighbours, employers and other community based networks)
- ◆ Inadvertently we were also tracking the impact of austerity measures on women and children's lives

Research design



- ◆ A research co-ordinator based in SWA, to follow 100 women and their children for three years after exiting services (January 2011 – March 2014)
- ◆ Four waves of data collection
- ◆ Multi-methods: scales and mapping exercises within in depth interviews; focus groups; art workshops; interviews and focus groups with a small number of children; two sets of interviews with key workers at SWA.
- ◆ Extensive use of women's words and images they created/shared (some are in this presentation).
- ◆ A final report and six themed briefing papers

Who the women were

- ◆ Age: 19-61
- ◆ Almost all (n=95) heterosexual, three bisexual, one lesbian and one data missing
- ◆ Most (n=84) had children, with 176 children between them.
- ◆ Diverse ethnicities: 42 White; 39 Black; 17 'mixed' or described themselves as 'other' (2 data missing)

Four waves of interviews

Wave	Research period	Number of women in sample
1	January 2011 – December 2011	100
2	January 2012 – December 2012	83
3	December 2012 – July 2013	72
4	September 2013 – March 2014	65

CORE CONCEPTS: COERCIVE CONTROL AND SPACE FOR ACTION

Perspective on domestic violence

- ◆ Beyond ‘incidentalism’
- ◆ A sustained pattern of behaviours - ‘coercive control’ and micro-management of everyday life (Stark, 2007)
- ◆ An abusive household gender regime (Morris, 2011)
- ◆ A ‘liberty crime’, so we focus not just safety but also FREEDOM

I was walking on eggshells and could never predict if he would be a monster or be nice

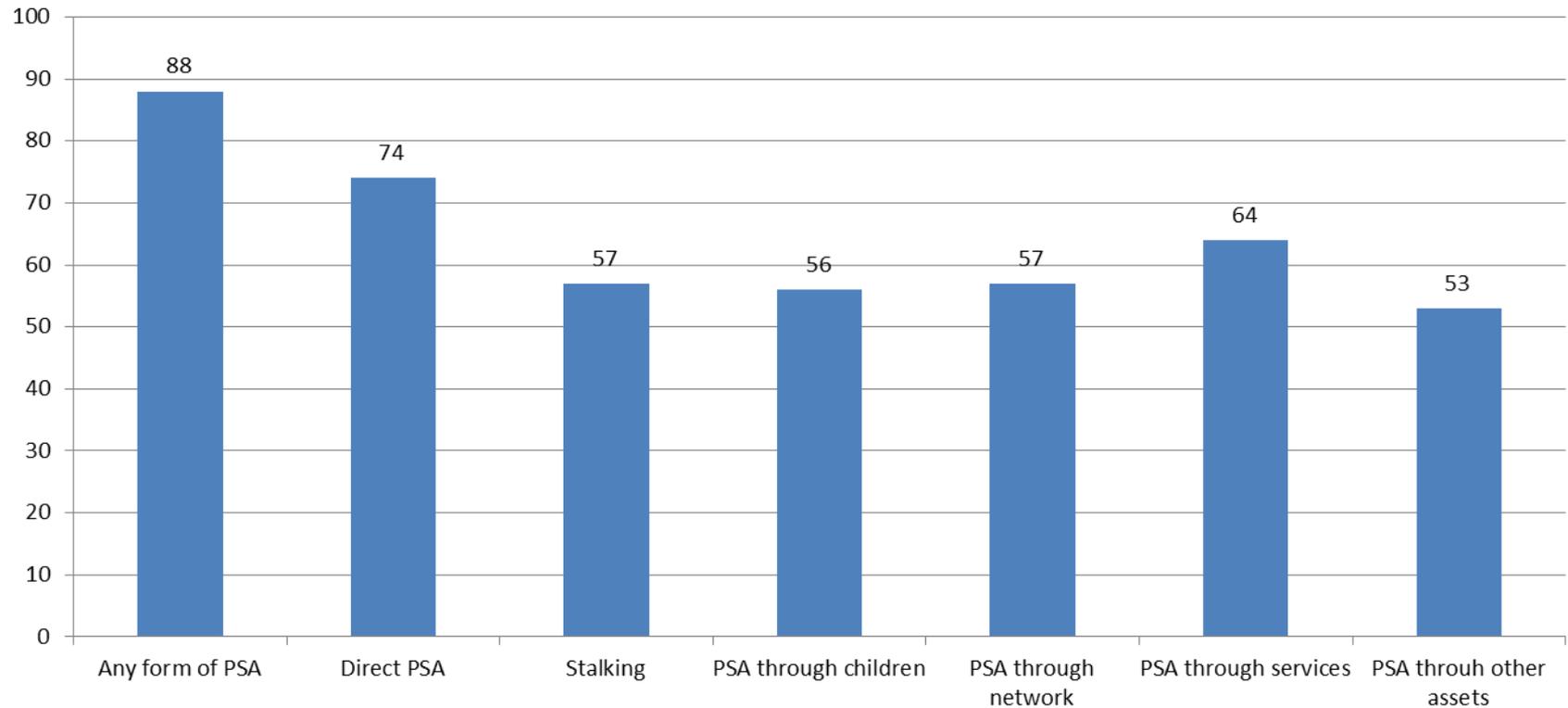
(Kaya)¹⁶

Coercive Control 1

- ◆ All but 2 woman had experienced coercive control, lower numbers reported physical and/or sexual violence
- ◆ Removing themselves from the immediate control of an abusive man was, for most, only the first step in establishing safety
- ◆ Abusive men found other ways to assert dominance: nearly 90 per cent of the women (n=72, third interview) reported experiencing post-separation abuse

Post separation abuse

**Percentage of women who experienced one or more forms of PSA
(n=72)**



Coercive Control 2

- ◆ IPV is understood by professionals as *incidents* of physical assault rather than a *pattern* of power and control which inflects everyday life
- ◆ Impact of post-separation abuse was minimised by professionals
- ◆ Women were hindered rather than supported in rebuilding their lives and had to undertake a huge amount of ‘safety work’

Space for Action



- ◆ The impact of living in an abusive household gender regime is that women (and children) adapt their behaviour to cope
- ◆ Their thinking and actions are narrowed, as they attempt to live and be his version of who they should be
- ◆ If interventions are not appropriate the web tightens
- ◆ It becomes harder and harder to imagine life outside of this control, what it is to have freedom of thought and action
- ◆ We call this limiting space for action

Space for Action Scale

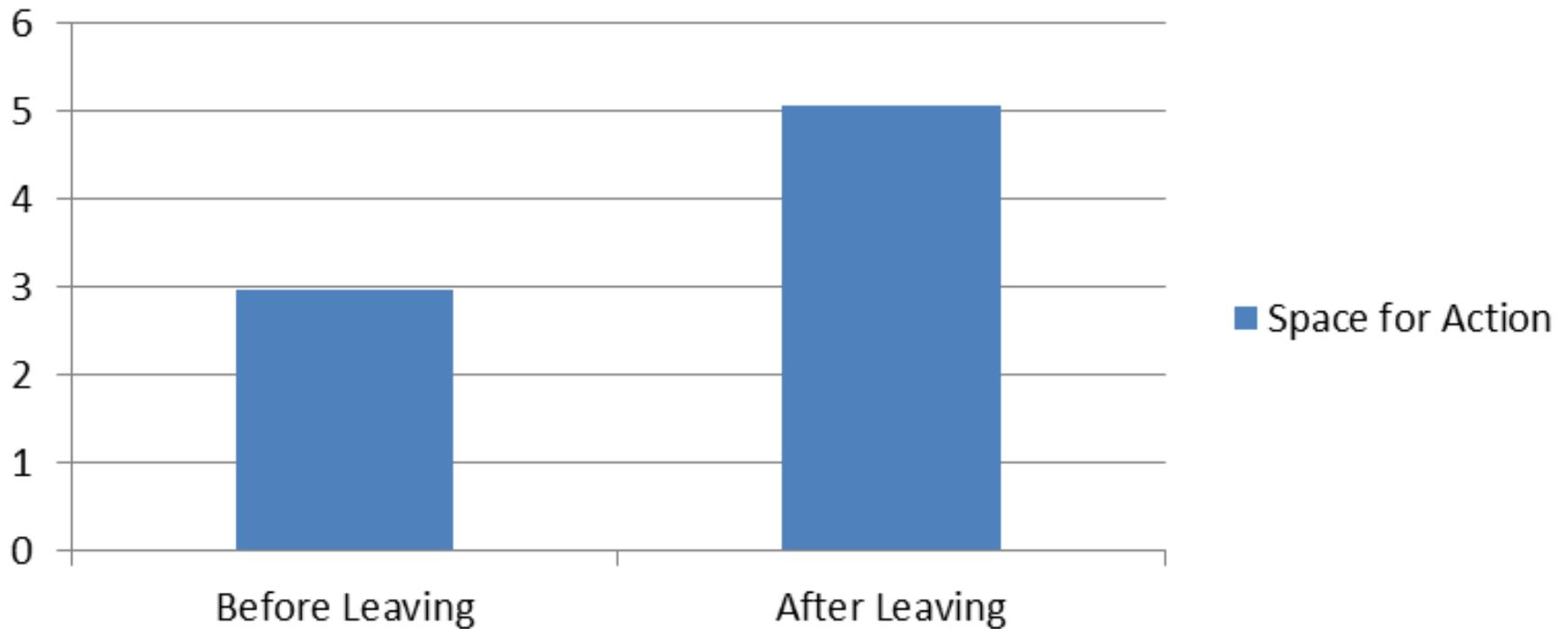


- ◆ A series of statements about how free women felt to do certain things covering
 - ◆ sense of self
 - ◆ Parenting
 - ◆ Well being and safety
 - ◆ Friends and family
 - ◆ Finances
 - ◆ Help seeking
 - ◆ Competence
 - ◆ Community

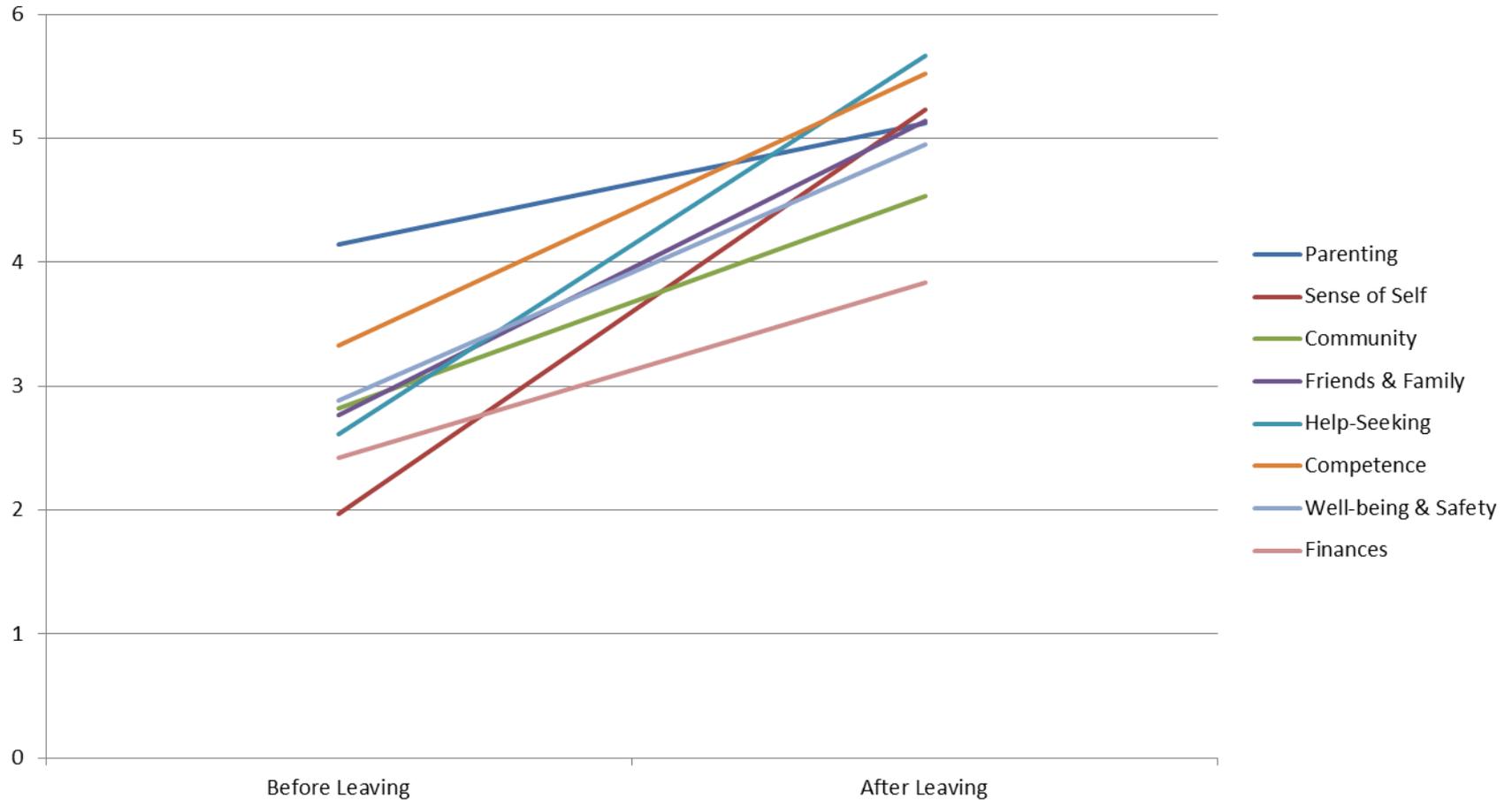
Space for Action

Change after leaving and accessing support

Space for Action



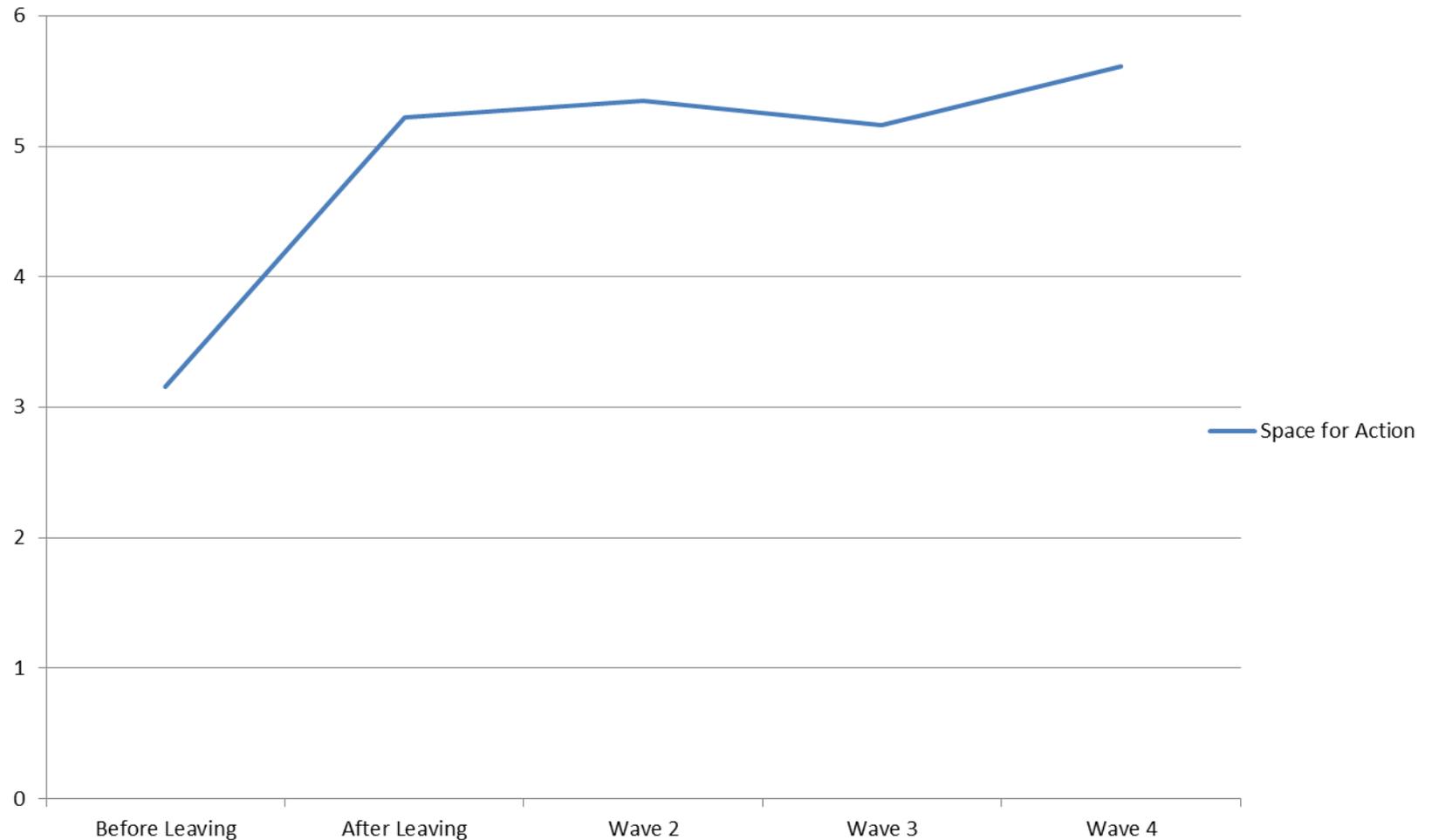
Space for Action across domains



Space for Action over the 3 years



Space for Action



Expanded space for action

I'm my own person; I can do what I want. I can answer my phone when I want, I can go where I want, I can eat what I want. I can wear what I want – I don't have to get dressed if I don't want to. I can watch a programme if I want. I can have a bath whenever I want. I can wake up in the middle of the night and strip naked around the house. I can do whatever I want to do.



The Implications



- ◆ Basic training should focus on coercive control and the recognition that leaving does not necessarily end abuse
- ◆ A system of monitoring the delivery of sensitive and responsive services to survivors needs to be developed – a key component would be regularly convened panels of survivors whose recent experiences of service use – good and bad – is considered as evidence

Holistic services

- ◆ The focus on short term risk reduction has led to under-recognition of the need for *ongoing* and longer term support which enables women and children to undo harms, be and *feel* safe, resettle and rebuild their relationships with each other and their wider networks
- ◆ Rebuilding lives takes time: some were still facing post-separation abuse three years on and many faced complex legal and practical challenges

Holistic services 2

- ◆ Holistic wrap around provision has not been sufficiently recognised
- ◆ All women and children who have experienced domestic violence should be able to access support for a minimum of 2 years after separation



Housing

- ◆ A home in which women and children can both feel safe and be safe is vital
- ◆ A quarter of women had to move three times or more after leaving a violent partner, a right to social housing and a secure tenancy
- ◆ Women and children made homeless through domestic violence should be recognised as a unique group fleeing crimes that take place in the home requiring special measures



Financial security1

- ◆ Many women suffered financial abuse within the relationship (this will be exacerbated by more recent 'welfare reforms')
- ◆ For some financial abuse continued and even intensified after separation
- ◆ The ending of crisis loans and community care grants makes the rebuilding process even more complex
- ◆ The rationing of Legal Aid resulted in some women giving up financial rights that previously might have been enforced by the courts
- ◆ A return to the make do and mend that was the case when the first refuges were established 40 years ago?



Community Resources

- ◆ Community resources hold the potential to be enablers or barriers to women re-building their lives
- ◆ In post-crisis situations and in the current context of eroded rights to welfare support, social housing and legal aid social and relational networks become even more critical
- ◆ Women managed their relationships, creating small but trusted networks

Enabling others

- ◆ National and local awareness raising work needs to expand understanding of what domestic violence is, including post-separation abuse, alongside clear messages about listening to and respecting survivors and offering support when needed



INNOVATIVE RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS



Contact details



To access the report:

<http://www.cwasu.org/>

<http://www.solacewomensaid.org>