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Series 2 Episode 4

Domestic abuse and Eastern European women: A Conversation with Louise Harvey-Golding and Carrie Phillips



[00:00:00] **Lesley:** Hello and welcome to the Portal Podcast, linking research and practice for social work. I'm your host and my name is Dr Lesley Deacon.

[00:00:13] **Sarah:** And I'm your other host and I'm Dr Sarah Lonbay. So we hope you enjoy today's episode.

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Introduction to Episode Series 2 Episode 4

[00:00:28] **Sarah:** Hi everyone. Welcome to the Portal podcast.

[00:00:31] **Sarah:** I'm joined today by Dr Lesley Deacon, as usual.

[00:00:34] **Lesley:** Hello, welcome.

[00:00:36] **Sarah:** And we also have Louise and Carrie here with us today to talk about their research. So I'll let them introduce themselves. Louise, do you want to start?

[00:00:43] **Louise:** Hi, I'm Dr Louise Harvey- Golding. I'm a Senior Lecturer in Public Health, and I'm here today to talk about our research with Eastern European women.

[00:00:54] **Carrie:** And I'm Carrie Phillips, I'm a Senior Lecturer in Social Work, and I was involved also in the data collection of the project with Eastern European women.

[00:01:04] **Sarah:** Thank you both for joining us.

[00:01:07] **Lesley:** So do you want to start off telling us what the research was about, so how it came about, what it's involved, and anything interesting about that?

[00:01:18] **Carrie:** I can start if you like. So to start with, the University was approached by ICOS, who are the International Community Organisation of Sunderland, and they were interested in knowing more about the experiences of the people they support. So we spoke to Michal Chantkowski and Julia Wysocka who both work for ICOS, and they were concerned about some of the things that, particularly the women accessing their women's group, difficulties they'd had getting support, engaging with services, and they wanted to commission some research actually speaking to these women and asking them what are the difficulties that they were facing.

[00:02:06] **Lesley:** Where are those women that were accessing the group, were they from different countries? What's the makeup of the people?

[00:02:13] **Carrie:** So ICOS supports any migrant to the UK, particularly the Sunderland area, but across the North East. But their women's group tends to be the people who tend to go there from Eastern European countries such as Poland Romania. I think one of the problems that we came across, wasn't it Louis, was a definition of Eastern European, because geographically that's not a very well defined area. But predominantly women who've come over to the UK when countries such as Romania joined the EU.

[00:02:54] **Lesley:** Right, okay. So technically from EU countries, but who historically are Eastern European, okay. So how did this research then develop from just having access to the group, to what you've come up with?

[00:03:11] **Louise:** So after several conversations with ICOS about the types of issues that they were hearing from the Eastern European women that they were working with, we came up with the idea of carrying out a piece of research with Eastern European women and also with service providers that work with Eastern European women. So the key aims of that research were to look at the experiences of Eastern European women in terms of whether or not they were experiencing hate crime and forms of discrimination, according to the Equality Act. We also wanted to look at any issues or barriers that Eastern European women had in accessing healthcare and support services. So those were the key aims. We started the research in 2021, and it was quite a long project, we were collecting research throughout that year, and during that

period of 2021 we were still within Covid restrictions and periods of lockdown, so obviously that prolonged the project and accessing the women. So just briefly, the research involved a survey with Eastern European women living in the North East, well living in Tyne and Wear, where we'd done an online survey with 127 Eastern European women and we looked at their experiences of discrimination, hate crime and their access to services. We then followed this up with focus groups and small discussions and some interviews with a small sub-sample of the Eastern European women, and also some interviews and focus groups with service providers in the North East who were working with those women. So that was really the project, in a nutshell. Don't think there's anything else I can say around that.

[00:05:23] **Lesley:** No, that sounds good.

[00:05:25] **Sarah:** I'm wondering whether the research aims, because Carrie mentioned that ICOS had said there are some things that came up in the women's group that they ran, so did those research aims that you just talked about, Louise, did they come from the women themselves initially? Is that how you decided what you were going to focus on? How did that come about, to focus on those particular aspects?

[00:05:46] **Carrie:** Should I answer that? Because I think the main way we designed the survey, and particularly the interview questions, was our colleague Julia from ICOS spoke to the women in the group because she's facilitated that group for a long time, she knows the women involved and she was able to ask them, well, what are your priorities? And they spoke about things like interpreting services, access to healthcare, being *repeatedly* asked for documentation were some of their biggest concerns. And so those were the things that we tried to draw out in our interviews.

[00:06:27] **Sarah:** Thank you.

[00:06:29] **Lesley:** So obviously for this podcast we're particularly interested in your findings around the issues of domestic abuse, because for this series what we're we're doing is looking at that as the main topic. And it's interesting because we're talking to different people who domestic abuse might be all they do in terms of research, but for others it's just you do something and then this comes up as one of your findings, which is obviously the case for you guys. So I know, because obviously I read your reports, which we will put a link to in our show notes won't we Sarah? And it means people can access that. But I

think one of the terms I thought was quite interesting, because obviously you looked at other research around it first, was this idea of 'hyper-precarity'. So with regard to their employment and things like that, their vulnerability. So I just wonder, could you just share with the people listening a little bit about what that means and what that looked like?

Hyper-precarity

[00:07:21] **Louise:** Okay, so the term 'hyper-precarity'. So what the wider research actually showed us, because obviously we reviewed the wider literature, was that Eastern European women living in the UK were facing hyper-precarity due to several reasons, so several main factors I guess. So some of the key things that lead to this are that according to the evidence compared to Eastern European men living in the UK, Eastern European women are less likely to be in full-time employment. And they're also more likely to be on zero-hour contracts. Another issue that actually feeds into this is that, like all women, and especially migrant women and also Eastern European women, we tend to have less flexibility in terms of the work, the employment that we can actually take. So this obviously impacts on the women's ability to be able to gain full-time employment. Because women are, and the research showed us that also migrant and Eastern European women are disproportionately responsible for childcare. So this obviously limits the types of employment opportunities that they can take, which then leads to precarity in employment, zero-hour contracts, situations where they may be more likely to be exploited in employment. The research shows that, and again this is linked with the other factors, that there's evidence that Eastern European women experience greater difficulties in gaining settled status, so actually gaining residency, and again that's in comparison to Eastern European men. And the reason for that is because of these issues with employment. So very often migrant women and Eastern European women tend to be more likely to be *dependent* upon a partner or a husband, financially dependent, their settled status, gaining residency and settled status, might be dependent on their spouse or their husband. Access to and entitlement to benefits and welfare and housing support and all of those types of things, they might all be dependent upon their husband or spouse. So that's the type of picture that I'm trying to create with regards to the hyper-precarity, so it's quite complex and multi-layered. So what we essentially have is all these issues that women face anywhere with regards to accessing employment, being disproportionately responsible for childcare, Eastern European women face an extra level of this vulnerability and precariousness because of the lack of settled status, language barriers being migrants and living in the UK. So, that in turn really leaves them highly

vulnerable to domestic violence and abuse. And particularly so when they are dependent upon a husband or spouse. And another layer of this is that in addition to it increasing their vulnerability to domestic violence and abuse, also women who are *already* in domestic violence domestic, abuse relationships, this hyper-precarity actually impedes their ability to be able to, one, seek support, and two, be able to escape abusive relationships. One more thing, sorry Carrie then it's to you, is that, and this is again something that affects all migrant women, is the lack of social support and family support. So often these are women who have left all their friends and their family behind, and we know from the research, we know from the evidence, we know, as you were all social workers, that actually those *informal* support networks are actually really, really key in escaping domestic abuse situations. So what we're actually seeing here is a really toxic mix of various factors that are impacting on Eastern European women's lives that leaves them vulnerable to exploitation at work, to domestic violence and abuse, and to other forms of exploitation like modern day slavery, that type of thing.

[00:12:25] **Sarah:** Do you have any, I'm just wondering while you're talking about this, because obviously your survey did cover a lot of participants didn't it and you did follow-up focus groups, and I'm just wondering if you've got a sense for us and for the listeners about the prevalence of domestic abuse for these women.

Prevalence of abuse

[00:12:43] **Carrie:** We don't really because it wasn't, like you said Lesley, the whole theme around domestic abuse is one that wasn't designed into the research, it was a finding that came out as particularly service providers were talking to us. So we didn't actually directly ask the women about abuse in the home, we were actually asking about abuse on the street, exploitation at work, hate crime, that kind of thing. And it was only later when we were looking through our transcripts that we thought, actually there's quite a lot here about domestic abuse. And I think one of the difficulties that any researcher has is finding out about prevalence, because when you look at Home Office statistics, the National Office for Statistics, they don't break things down. Their monitoring of things like ethnicity is very vague, are we describing people from Eastern Europe as European? As white? As mixed? It's a problem when you're trying to find out how big an issue this is.

[00:14:01] **Sarah:** And even if you could unpick that from the data, which it sounds like it's not possible to do, that would only be the tip of the iceberg anyway, probably. That wouldn't really capture the true picture of what's happening, we know that for any population group, don't we? Who's experiencing domestic abuse.

The impact of Brexit

[00:14:18] **Carrie:** Yeah, and one thing I was going to say about what Louise was describing is, in some ways this isn't *news* because this kind of exploitation and precarity has been happening for migrant women for goodness knows how long, but the difference that we found is the impact of Brexit and the impact of the UK leaving the EU means that there's a whole new layer of bureaucracy for women who 10 years ago might have assumed that they could move to the UK and live here with no issue, and now suddenly finding that they're susceptible to all the risks that migration brings.

[00:14:57] **Lesley:** Yeah, because when Louise was just explaining that in my head I was thinking, hang on, but Poland was part of the EU. But then the issue is that *we're not*.

[00:15:06] **Sarah:** What was the impact of Brexit then? You said it obviously changed things for the women, but can you tell us a bit more about that?

[00:15:12] **Carrie:** Yeah, I think it's precisely that, that when everybody was quite, I say everybody, when the UK and places like Poland were coexisting in the EU, there was some restrictions, but a certain amount of freedom of movement, so moving to the UK, getting a job, that wasn't as precarious as it is now. And what particularly places like ICOS Citizens Advice have found is that, increasingly, there was quite a lot of publicity about needing to apply for settled status, but some people had lived here so long they didn't think it applied to them, or they didn't think it applied to their children, or they wanted family and friends to move over. And also it links into what Louise was saying about the difficulties of leaving an abusive relationship, actually part of that was proving you've lived in the UK long enough to apply for settled status. Because what the government is interested in is, I read a really interesting piece of research that called it 'ties that count', so things like employment, having National Insurance numbers, things like that, are different to ties that *bind*, which are family, friends, community, belonging, a feeling of belonging. That doesn't matter if you're applying for settled status, only the paperwork

that you may not have because you've been dependent on the partner, you've been caring for children, you can't prove you've been in the UK for more than five years.

[00:16:46] **Lesley:** Which makes more issues and complexity around the decision to leave if that environment is an abusive environment, doesn't it? And I think you touched on that.

[00:16:56] **Carrie:** Yeah, and I think one of the things that came out of our interviews with service providers was, again, it's not new that in some abusive relationships immigration status is used as a weapon. So either withholding somebody's documents, allowing their status in the UK to lapse, using it as a threat, "if you leave I'll shop you to the home office". Again, that's not new, but it's new in terms of those people who were, who *are* EU citizens but now have fewer rights in the UK.

[00:17:28] **Lesley:** Yeah, okay, I was just processing that, sorry. That's really interesting, because I suppose it reflects the fact that research is about a certain time and space and it's within the context of that time. So what's quite unique to what you guys have done is that at that moment in time you have the repercussions on those people of the decision to leave and therefore they're experiencing these *bureaucratic* problems that are compounding what is abusive relationships and trying to seek support for that.

[00:18:07] **Carrie:** Yeah, and I think one of the, was it in one of the focus groups Louise? One of the women spoke about receiving a letter to her house asking her to prove her address.

[00:18:17] **Sarah:** That makes sense, very logical!

[00:18:20] **Carrie:** That just struck us as very, what's the word?

[00:18:24] **Lesley:** Could you just say, "well I received it, so that's it".

[00:18:28] **Carrie:** There's a word for it, isn't there? Where things are...

[00:18:31] **Lesley:** I can't think of it, I just think of out-of-control bureaucracies that just have gone... I mean, it sounds like it's, this is why I find things about bureaucracy quite interesting because a lot of people find, "oh it's a boring area, it's just about paperwork and structures and organisations", but actually

the impact it has on people's lives, so the people who are experiencing this, and then on the professionals who are trying to do something about it who are getting stuck because, well we know these people need some support, how do we get that for them? And so I wonder if you wanted to tell us a little bit about some of those themes around the impact of like, the language and communication, the lack of access to that, the interpreting services and the issue around the documentation? Was that part of what you found from the participants and from the people and the professionals as well?

Language and communication

[00:19:25] **Louise:** Yeah, so I'll let Carrie tell you about the service providers, because Carrie spoke to the service providers, but with regards to the women in the focus groups with the Eastern European women there were a lot of concerns around Brexit and how this was going to impact on their entitlement to welfare, their rights to reside in the UK, etc. And within this we also have these huge challenges and barriers that a lot of the women were having around language and communication in accessing, not just services, but actually in health literature, in advice, leaflets, the language barriers aren't just in the face-to-face communication, it's within the information and the guidance and the literature as well. So there were a lot of challenges raised around that. And what actually women were telling us that they were doing, and what their friends were doing, and what their family members were doing, is actually relying on friends and family to interpret. So there may be an interpretation service available, but it might not be available within a particular language. So there was a lot of reliance on family and friends actually taking them into the GP surgery, taking them to medical appointments, listening in on phone calls to actually act as an interpreter for them. Now this obviously has huge repercussions and implications. So, for example, if a woman is suffering from mental ill health, to actually have to take a close family member or a friend to those appointments and talk about their vulnerabilities and their mental health is actually, I mean on one level is really embarrassing, but on another level it also really contravenes their human right to privacy. You know, they're opening up their lives and their health issues and their mental health issues to this really small support network that they've actually got in the UK. And another level of this, which a woman spoke to us about, was a friend who had a cancer diagnosis and had to take their child to interpret for them. So it isn't just thinking about the impact that this has on the human rights of these women who are relying on their friends and family to interpret, it's also that the mental health of their children, who are having to hear and relay these messages... you know, imagine being a child and having that responsibility.

[00:22:35] **Sarah:** And having to hear all of that as well.

[00:22:37] **Louise:** Yeah. And then when we really think about the increase in vulnerability and risk to domestic violence, if you're reliant upon your family and a very small support network, in a very close community, we know that migrant communities form communities within, so say for example the Eastern European community in Sunderland, and the African community in Sunderland, we know people form these communities. So if you have a woman in a domestic violence, domestic abuse situation, and she's relying upon a family member or someone from this support network to actually translate and interpret information and accessing services, how on earth is this woman going to be able to access services for support and to actually escape a domestic abuse relationship? Because there's no escaping!

[00:23:41] **Lesley:** No. it's making me think that potentially the abusive person is that interpreter for them as well.

[00:23:47] **Louise:** Possibly, yeah.

[00:23:48] **Sarah:** Then they don't have an opportunity even to disclose because that person might be with them.

[00:23:55] **Louise:** And whether or not people, what is the status of the perpetrator within that small community? Maybe the perpetrator within that small community has a lot of power, and disclosing to other members of the community, they might be more likely to defend the perpetrator as opposed to protect and support the victim. So yeah, that's quite...

[00:24:20] **Lesley:** It's concerning, isn't it? Because it's in doing this as the series for the podcast, it is about, in another podcast we've got, it's the fact that actually what a lot of the issues are that it's very much reliant on the victim to get themselves out of the situation. Get them out, they've got to leave the house, and it's not so much about then the perpetrator in these, and it shares a similarity with obviously what you are saying about these challenges in these communities, which means that it's not *necessarily* this open, safe space in which the person can say, "you know what, this is happening". Because it's hard enough for that individual to see that this is not right and this shouldn't be going on, and then they've got to speak out, and then there's another area of where there's barriers. So it was just making me think, we do this in the podcast, because we listen to all of you and we say, "oh, you guys

have said this, and that connects up there". And I think there's a real fundamental problem there that this is *always* about actually the victims getting themselves out and not enough, not that we have the answer, but not enough about actually but they're a victim in that situation, so actually we need things to be going to them to make it easier. And it sounds to me like there's always another barrier. Which is obviously what you've found in the research.

[00:25:43] **Louise:** I mean even there was something that I didn't mention there, but women who have got children as well, when they're facing this what we're calling hyper-precarity, there's obviously the anxiety that if they do disclose domestic violence or abuse, then the children could be removed.

[00:26:05] **Lesley:** Right, so that fear around how that's going to pan out for them.

[00:26:10] **Louise:** Yeah. Or whether or not, if they are reliant upon a husband or a partner, whether or not that husband or partner would be able to take the children away.

[00:26:21] **Lesley:** Yes. Because you were saying before about that reliance that they have on that partner, those vulnerabilities around the employment, around their position in the community, then gets compounded by all that. Which is what came out to me in reading your reports, was about the fact that this is quite a complex situation, there's lots of different things and the domestic use is one part of this. But the barriers are quite significant. Did you find this with, because you spoke to the professionals and the service providers Carrie?

[00:27:02] **Carrie:** I mean, if I may, I wanted to just add something to what Louise was saying, obviously it is a huge concern when people maybe don't have fluent English and they're not able to access information and resources. But actually one really, I guess interesting contrast, was I would view it possibly as a limitation of our research that the women who took part in the focus groups were offered interpreters but didn't accept because they were all fluent in English. So we didn't hear as much from women who were less fluent or confident. But going back to the point, in the focus groups they spoke about assumptions that they don't speak English, and assumptions based on accent, assumptions based on their ability at work, their ability to access information. And these were women who'd either lived in the UK a long time or studied

English or from their point of view they had no issue. What was the contrast though was that some service providers said that that can be difficult because at times of high stress fluency in a second or additional language can become impaired. Or they gave an example of police attending a violent situation, the woman doesn't want an interpreter, but the precision of her English and what she's reporting the police are saying is maybe not a hundred percent. And therefore there can be miscommunications based on heightened emotion as well as language proficiency.

[00:28:44] **Lesley:** Yeah, because anyone in those situations, you know, just, yeah.

[00:28:49] **Louise:** And there's also the issue that even the uninformed, so even the formal interpreters, there's a high possibility that they could be from the community as well.

[00:29:01] **Lesley:** Yeah, I remember that from in practice when there was only, depending on the language as well, there was that issue of actually there's an ethical problem here because yes, they're professionals and we're not questioning that side of it at all, but it's very awkward for the person that you're trying to speak to, that it means somebody in the community does know all of this. So it's then a choice, they're having to make a conscious choice to accept that person. So you can understand why they might say, "no, I don't want an interpreter". Because it's like, I don't want this person in the community to know that this is happening.

[00:29:33] **Carrie:** Or even if they're not in the community, somebody being privy to such a wide range of situations, it might be health, it might be criminal justice, it might be education. You know, I think interpreters do a fantastic job, but they're not maybe perceived by the people needing that support as almost being allowed to be privy to all of that personal knowledge.

[00:30:00] **Lesley:** Do you think because maybe not enough is done to support that individual to understand that this is another professional and therefore they're not going to breach confidentiality? And I'm sure they do go through things like that, but it is awkward, isn't it? It's something that, where if English is your first language, you don't go through that extra level of having another professional. Because my experience of life is many professionals get involved for one issue, you've got loads of professionals, and it's really annoying. And the more you got, the more you're constantly repeating yourself. Because I

think you were saying, were you saying that's something that the women talked about? About having to share information again and again? Or was it documentation or something? Right, okay.

[00:30:47] **Louise:** Something to add to that is that the issue of Government and NHS employees gatekeeping services, with possibly not all of the one authority and knowledge to do so. So an example might be a GP receptionist asking somebody they perceived to be a migrant, and especially so since Brexit, with all the increased media coverage, thinking that it's their responsibility to actually check whether or not they are eligible to use a particular service. So frontline staff taking it upon themselves to execute these checks themselves.

[00:31:38] **Sarah:** I wonder just while we're back onto Brexit and the issues that that raised, it made me think about our chat with Rick as well.

[00:31:47] **Lesley:** Oh yeah, in the last series.

[00:31:48] **Sarah:** In the first Podcast series we talked to Dr Rick Bowler about his paper on Brexit and the rise in racism, and we have seen that, so I'm thinking what you're saying, there are a lot of barriers to these women accessing services, whether or not they can actually find out about them in the first place. All these things that we've talked about, but I just wonder if there was anything about that that came up as well in terms of the environment feeling hostile to them, whether they felt actually welcomed into services or whether that was an additional barrier that they faced.

Racism and hate crime

[00:32:23] **Louise:** So the Government statistics *clearly* show us that there was a huge rise in racist hate crime and discrimination both in the runup to the Brexit referendum and after the Brexit referendum, and I'm talking about increases in the *thousands*, you know? And this was in large part to do with Government campaigns at the time, these buses with these really anti-immigration sentiments on, there was a lot of stoking anti-immigration sentiment within society at that time within the UK. So we know that was happening. And we also know the evidence shows us that the Brexit referendum actually led to not just an increase in racist hate crime, but an increase in racist discrimination and hate crime towards the Eastern European community within the UK. So we'd already seen quite a steady rise of anti-immigration sentiment, due to Government messages and due to the media

before Brexit, but with Brexit we did see a huge rise. So that was something that we did sort of explore with the women. And we did find in the survey and in the focus groups that actually Eastern European women were telling us that they were experiencing high levels of both racist hate crime, racist discrimination, and to a smaller extent sexist discrimination as well. And women did tell us that there had been an increase in this in the runup to Brexit and since Brexit. Things like coming home from work and being recognised as being a European migrant and being subject to slurs around the whole Brexit narrative. You know, "you're from here, you go back home, you go back at Brexit, why are you still here?" So the women were really aware of that, and that did come across quite strongly in the survey findings. Women were being subject to racial discrimination in the streets, racial discrimination at work by their colleagues and by management, and this was all to do with the Brexit. You know, with the Brexit narrative and the increase in the anti-immigration sentiment. And very often what some women told us was that because a lot of the women present as European, very often they were telling us they can 'pass', so to speak, until they actually speak. So until their spoken voice is heard. So what we had is women telling us that in public places where they felt particularly vulnerable, so like waiting at a Metro station, being on public transport, within the city centres, after certain times, passing certain people, groups of people and things like that, that actually they just, they would stay silent. They would make the effort to stay silent, because they felt that this would minimise the chances of a racist attack.

[00:36:05] **Lesley:** Of course, if they stay silent then they blend in and they don't get the attention, as soon as they talk that's when they might be at risk.

[00:36:13] **Louise:** So, yeah, it was quite...

[00:36:18] **Lesley:** Yeah, that's quite hard.

[00:36:20] **Sarah:** And it's even more isolating for women who are experiencing domestic abuse in the home as well, I would imagine, because there's no escape, there's no support outside of the home if they're experiencing those kinds of things.

[00:36:34] **Carrie:** Yeah, and I think that's one thing that came through as a recurring, underpinning theme, is that we're talking about a minority group, or a *minoritised* group, who aren't what I would call 'visible'. They're not visibly different, their skin colour isn't generally different to the white British

population. And one thing that really struck me when I was trying to even recruit for interviews with service providers was the number of providers who replied to my request saying, "well, we don't really support any Eastern European people". And I'm thinking, well, the statistics tell us they're 1% of the population of the North East. So

[00:37:18] **Lesley:** they're there.

[00:37:18] **Carrie:** How are you not? And the explanation being either that European migrants are not accessing those services because of all the reasons we talked about, documentation, language, etc. Or they're there, but they're not being seen as having needs that they have for language-appropriate information or all the rest of it.

[00:37:45] **Sarah:** That's a bit of a cycle in itself because if those barriers prevent them from accessing the services, the services then think "oh, we don't need to do this". It was the same with the domestic abuse and older people. We've done a podcast on that and it was the same issue, that because older people are not accessing the services, there's a view that they don't need them, and then it becomes cyclical where the information and the awareness isn't there.

[00:38:10] **Carrie:** And it was interesting because some of the providers I spoke to were 'for and by' organisations. And they had, I would say, quite a strikingly different level of knowledge than the generalist services about this specific issue.

[00:38:26] **Sarah:** What were the services you included then? Obviously not specifically naming them, but just generally what types of services?

[00:38:32] **Carrie:** They were all voluntary sector organisations, and all involved, in some form, supporting either women and girls at risk of abuse or migrant populations. So, and like I say, it was quite difficult to recruit actually.

[00:38:55] **Sarah:** So was that the same across both of those types of services then, that report that "oh, we don't really work with women from Eastern Europe"?

[00:39:01] **Carrie:** Yes. And particularly, in any research there's always a difficulty, people have to want to speak to you or think they've got something

to say, but actually, particularly statutory services told us that it's not an issue they're aware of. And several other voluntary sector organisations said, "oh, we don't focus on that population", or "it's not a population that we need to provide support to".

[00:39:29] **Lesley:** That's the problem with, I mean my previous research around things around systems is when you look at generic systems, they don't know there's a problem until it really does come up in the face and say, "yes, this is an issue". And it's constantly recurring, but it is there. All of these problems are there, it's just about whether or not their systems are set up to notice them. I was talking to a practitioner recently, they were saying that that predominantly the issues they're facing are around domestic abuse. And we were discussing how that's because they're *looking* for them now. They're now looking for them and they see them, but they're actually saying, "well we don't, we don't get a lot of issues around sexual abuse". But the question was, "have you asked, are you looking?" And they were quite honest and said "no, what we're looking at is domestic abuse", and it's what's currently in your sight. Because it's so complex, social work practice and working with people, it's about *all* of their lives, not just one tiny subset of it. And that's the problem with the generic services, they're trying to make sense of a big issue, but it's got all these tiny, tiny parts to it.

[00:40:35] **Carrie:** And I think the other thing that came across is, Louise has given quite a lot of awful examples of particularly discrimination, hate crime, a lot of it was around property damage or verbal abuse, wasn't it? But what we found again, with the focus groups and talking to service providers, is that it's *chronically* underreported because it's so common that somebody shouting, "go home, why are you still here?" doesn't even register as something that could be reported. Because it's so common.

[00:41:10] **Sarah:** It's really shocking, isn't it? Actually that's become so normal that it's not even thought about or responded to.

Sexual harrasment

[00:41:19] **Louise:** It's really normalised and routine. I mean, the women that I spoke to in the focus groups didn't even view, some of the racist abuse that they were encountering, they didn't even view that as discrimination, as hate crime, it was just seen as a normal part of their day, a normal part of travelling home from work. What I would like to raise, because I think this is something

that we haven't touched on, is that because we know that both men and women within the Eastern European community, and children, are experiencing increased levels of racist hate crime. Now, what we found that was distinct to women, and also has similarities with other migrant women, is that in addition to the racist discrimination there was quite high levels of *sexist* discrimination and a lot of sexual harassment. And this was in all areas of women's lives. This was at work, Eastern European women suffering sexual harassment, quite serious, I mean all sexual harassment is serious, but very serious forms of sexual harassment at work. Being in precarious employments or being unable to financially afford to actually just make the decision to leave that employment, not being taken seriously by management, "oh he's just making a joke, just ignore him", that type of thing. But not just the sexual harassment at work, they were also experiencing a lot, or they *are* experiencing a lot of sexual harassment in public as well. And this was something that was described by a few of the women, so an example that one woman gave us was that she tended not to go out socialising in places that served alcohol, so bars and clubs and things like that, not because she didn't like it, but because of the sexual harassment that she suffered as an Eastern European woman. So there seems to be, and this is still something we're theorising about and we haven't quite put our fingers on it yet, that there's really negative, quite toxic, pervasive sexual stereotypes that relate to Eastern European women that actually feed into this sexual harassment narrative. So one woman told us about a time that when they stopped going out to bars and clubs it was because they had men approaching them, asking them were they sex workers or prostitutes, and then there's also the assumption that they were living in poverty, that actually the countries they come from were poor. So one woman said she had an instance of a man waving a five pound note in her face and saying like, "I bet this is lots of money where you come from, look I'm rich". So it's not just the racist element, it's not just the sexual harassment element, these women are telling us that they're very highly sexualised and that's impacting on the types of sexual harassment that they're experiencing.

[00:45:03] **Lesley:** It links across to the work of, because we've got Angie Wilcock who's done a podcast that's in this series as well, and hers was research with Thai women. And she's shared within that around the perception of them as well that they must be part of the sex industry. So we need to get you guys in touch with each other is what I'm thinking, to develop that.

[00:45:24] **Louise:** It seems every time we try and map this out into some kind of intersectional model there's more things that are coming out around it that are really distinct to Eastern European women.

Violence against women and girls

[00:45:39] **Louise:** Around that question, this specific DA, I don't think we can say it's domestic abuse, I think we need to place it within VAWG. So the domestic abuse just captures what's going on within the woman's domestic situation, whereas our research found much wider forms.

[00:46:02] **Lesley:** Around violence against women outside the home.

[00:46:05] **Louise:** Yeah, I think it situates better within violence against women and girls, so that's the intersectional element fits in with VAWG and the DVA is within that. Still trying to develop this theoretical model.

[00:46:20] **Lesley:** What does VAWG mean?

[00:46:21] **Louise:** Violence against women and girls.

[00:46:23] **Lesley:** Oh, thank you, sorry.

[00:46:26] **Sarah:** I think you're right. A lot of what you've been talking about is much broader than just domestic abuse, isn't it? But all of those things will contribute to some of the difficulties in accessing support for domestic abuse as well, won't they?

[00:46:41] **Louise:** I think what we're looking at is that what we're saying is distinct, and we're still not quite there with that, is the violence against women and girls that Eastern European women experience and the intersectional elements of that. So that's what we're saying is distinct.

[00:47:02] **Lesley:** So your research was about their experiences inside and outside of the home, so therefore what your research isn't identifying was what was particular in terms of domestic abuse between them and the perpetrator of that abuse. What your research has found is that they talked about that, but they're also subject to this *broader* violence against women and girls within society, which is making it a much more complex issue. Carrie, is there anything you would like to add?

Invisibility

[00:47:37] **Carrie:** No, I think again the issue of specific concerns for Eastern European women, again it's one of visibility. So for example one of our interviewees from a service provider was talking about forced marriage, for example, and the fact that there's a perception that this is something that happens in South Asian families or families of South Asian heritage or potentially amongst people with learning disabilities, there's increased knowledge. But actually the forced marriage unit supports a lot of people from Romania or of Romanian heritage being pressured into forced marriage. Again, it's about that often services and even the general public are aware of issues, but they associate it with certain minoritised groups, and don't realise that it affects a much wider subsection of society.

[00:48:41] **Louise:** So I guess their invisibility allows them to develop strategies to avoid racist abuse, discrimination in public, but that invisibility also leads to problems with regards to raising awareness about the discrimination and hate crime and abuse that Eastern European women are facing. You know, getting the message out there that this is actually happening, educating and training service providers and healthcare providers on the specific issues and experiences of Eastern European women. So I like that Carrie, that visible and invisible, that invisibility I guess is really problematic.

[00:49:31] **Lesley:** It's a challenge isn't it, because I know someone who's originally from Poland and she runs her own business, and when I met her, I'm obviously not going to give the exact details, but she was using a very English name. And I talked to her, and this is obviously just anecdotal about me who knows somebody, but I talked to her about it when we got to know each other, and she said it's because of how she would be treated, she'd be treated differently. Because I thought she had an absolutely beautiful Polish name, and she said, "but that wouldn't get me, in business, it wouldn't get me through the door. I would have all of these challenges and difficulties". And I think it's almost like there's a coping strategy there to try and manage things that actually means that therefore they're not seen, they're invisible, and yet all of these issues are being encountered. And so the services are not noticing them and not providing them. So I think the idea with this podcast is about awareness raising as well, and putting this information out there. So I think hopefully that's what we'll have achieved. So I'm just pulling that round to is there anything that you feel the key learning, do you want to go for that?

[00:50:39] **Sarah:** No, I was just thinking about what you were saying because it's almost like there needs to be *both* in some ways, because those strategies are being, not that they should have to be invisible when they're out and about, but that helps avoid. But they need to be visible in other ways to actually raise the awareness and have the things put in place to stop them having to be invisible in some spaces.

[00:51:00] **Carrie:** Yeah, and I think one of the things that I mentioned that some of the providers I spoke to were "by and for" services, and the point that they were *really* keen to get across was that they're there to be a support for generalist services, they're not there to replace generalist services. But what they find they're doing is replacing, because people don't have access, don't want to access, are not seen by general services.

[00:51:30] **Sarah:** So just while we're nicely led onto this, two final questions. What key service developments would you like to see based on this research?

[00:51:40] **Lesley:** They're busy doing a little looking at each other, who's going to speak, who's going to speak? Who wants to speak? Go on, Louise. What's your recommendations here?

Recommendations

[00:51:48] **Louise:** So, recommendations based on our findings are obviously we need to carry out more research into Eastern European women and their experiences of discrimination, hate crime, domestic violence and abuse, access to services. That the knowledge in that research area is growing, but it's still within quite early stages of infancy. So we do need more research around that, but we need money to do that research. With regards to our recommendations to service providers and Government agencies, is that we recommend that healthcare support and other public service providers provide more widely translated information in a wider variety of languages, and this is particularly important for local and community based services. You know, that actually those 'led by and for' services that are supporting women through domestic violence and abuse. And family planning and women only services, so it isn't just about getting this information translated for the bigger services, the bigger NHS services, we need more translated information and more interpreters within these really crucial 'led by and for' and community organisations that are actually, they're the ones who are supporting the women, those grassroots organisations. But obviously they need money to be

able to do this. So some focus around that might help to actually get on the path towards those services being able to provide better translation and better interpretation.

[00:53:50] **Louise:** We feel that that there should be higher standards of monitoring and reporting of racist hate crimes, especially towards the Eastern European community. Obviously we do need to focus on wider racist discrimination and hate crimes against the BME community as a whole, but as we've established we have the issue with this community being particularly invisible. So some focus around monitoring and reporting specifically for this community. And maybe even looking more into, not even just the Eastern European community as a whole, looking into the different ethnicities within the Eastern European community and how we can actually know what levels of discrimination are these people facing and how we can support them better. I've got loads, is that enough or do you want more?

[00:54:53] **Lesley:** Yeah, no, that's definitely enough.

[00:54:56] **Sarah:** Is there any key learning that social workers should take in particular from this research? Because we're primarily aiming at social work with this podcast.

Messages for social workers

[00:55:07] **Carrie:** Yeah, I think one of our key messages would be not making assumptions. So language is one of the things we've talked about, that a lot of people are very fluent in English or multiple languages and it's about asking, "do you need an interpreter?" Thinking about different circumstances where that may or may not be needed. And the other key thing actually, that I would say, is just a reminder that diversity and difference aren't always visible. I always found as a team manager or interviewing students, when we ask about diversity and equality, people struggle to think of examples. They think of diversity as skin colour, and nothing deeper than that. And I think that would be my take home message.

[00:55:58] **Sarah:** That's great.

[00:55:58] **Lesley:** That's great. Thank you.

[00:56:00] **Sarah:** Thank you Carrie. Thank you Louise, for coming to talk to us today about this research. And thanks Lesley.

[00:56:06] **Lesley:** You're welcome.

[00:56:07] **Sarah:** And goodbye to all our listeners, we'll see you next time.

[00:56:09] **Lesley:** Thank you.

[00:56:10] **Louise:** Thank you.

[00:56:10] **Carrie:** Thank you.

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[00:56:11] **Sarah:** You have been listening to the Portal Podcast, linking research and practice for social work with me, Dr Sarah Lonbay.

[00:56:19] **Lesley:** And Dr Lesley Deacon. And this was funded by the University of Sunderland, edited by Paperghosts, and our theme music is called, *Together We're Stronger* by All Music Seven.

[00:56:29] **Sarah:** And don't forget that you can find a full transcript of today's podcast and links and extra information in our show notes. So anything you want to follow up from what you've heard today, check out there and you should find some useful extra resources.

[00:56:42] **Sarah:** See you all next time.

[00:56:44] **Lesley:** Bye.