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Private violence/Private transport: the role of means of transport in women's mobility to escape from domestic violence in England and Wales

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Abstract: This article highlights a gendered and forced mobility which has been under-recognised in the literature on mobility. It explores the hidden relocations of women (often with children) due to intimate partner abuse; presenting findings from mixed methods research on women's journeys to escape domestic violence, including analysis of over 80 journey segments made by 20 women within England and Wales, and from abroad. Focusing on means of transport, the research found that under a third of journey segments were made by public transport, and these tended to be longer distances; that journeys by disabled women were more likely to be by private transport, and that journeys from rural areas were more likely to be with the assistance of others. Thematic analysis of interviews at different stages of women's journeys is used to explore their experiences of different means of transport in terms of degrees of control and agency, in terms of losing or retaining personal possessions on the move; and in highlighting the role of others' assistance in compounding or counteracting the implications of abuse. Women's domestic violence journeys are thereby contextualised within wider mobilities research, uncovering the inequalities and implications of this hidden internal displacement in the UK.

Keywords: Mobilities; Transport; Journeys; Mixed Methods; Disability; Rural

1. Introduction

This article highlights a gendered and forced mobility which has been under-recognised in the literature on mobility in the United Kingdom. Research on forced migration and displacement of people internationally highlights the interplay of public and private processes, and the political implications, exclusions and constraints of boundary-crossings (Mountz et al. 2012). Research on mobility within states provides analysis on inequalities across dimensions such as urban and rural places, and differential access to means of transport (Bissell 2009; Bissell 2016). The focus here is to bring together mobility concepts of control and agency, and differential and unequal access to mobility, with empirical research on the journeys of women and children escaping domestic violence.

Domestic violence – with the focus here being on male violence towards women in intimate relationships – has historically been characterised as private violence (Dobash and Dobash 1979; CRAWC 1988), with more recent definitions highlighting the regime of control that creates intimate terrorism (Johnson 2008; Pain 2014). This privacy has been evoked to account for under-reporting of actions that are crimes, for inadequate or absent responses by services and authorities, and for a general under-recognition of the extent and implications of such abuse throughout society. Notwithstanding such privacy concerns, a significant prevalence of domestic violence is increasingly recognised, and understood within a wider context of violence against women. The United Nations recognises such violence as a human rights abuse, and a significant cause and consequence of gender inequality (UN 2006). A high level of incidence is recorded, for example 1,031,120 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales in the year ending March 2016 (ONS 2017), and tens of thousands of women seek assistance from public authorities such as

the police and local authorities every year. Others are able to escape the abuse without accessing public resources, especially if they have sufficient private resources to achieve protection and/or relocation away from the abuser (Paterson 2009). In some cases, it is the abuser who is tackled by the public authorities, with 100,930 prosecutions and 75,235 convictions in England and Wales in 2015-16 (with 92.1% of defendants being male) (Crown Prosecution Service 2016). However, all these figures should be considered with some caution, given the acute difficulties in counting either prevalence or incidence (Walby and Towers 2017). Much domestic violence against women remains private, for reasons including fear, danger, embarrassment, autonomy and lack of confidence in public authorities.

This article is based on research about the mobility of women and children who try to escape domestic violence. The coercive control within an abusive relationship continues to be played out in constraining or forcing women's mobility, and their possibilities of escape. Because women are leaving a husband or partner who generally knows them well, and may try to track them down to reassert control over them and their lives, the journeys are necessarily hidden. Some will travel to family or friends' homes, but it is likely that the abuser will know all such places. Some will have the resources to move and re-establish their lives elsewhere, and others will access public resources for part or most of their journeys. This may include applying under homelessness legislation for local authority assistance, or using civil law or criminal law provision for protection. It may also involve accessing temporary accommodation provided by non-governmental organisations, or specialist supportive accommodation such as women's domestic violence refuges (Bowstead 2019a). In England in 2015-16, community-based domestic violence services accepted 61,491 referrals and refuges accepted 7,552 referrals; with 2,017 women and 2,118 children/young

people (aged under 18) resident in a refuge on the Day to Count in October 2016 (Women's Aid 2017).

Few women experience straightforward journeys from the domestic abuse to safe resettlement. Most journeys are complex and multi-staged, including periods of residence and periods of movement (Bowstead 2017a). Some of these stages leave administrative traces: a record of a police call-out, a granting of a civil law non-molestation order, a period staying in a women's refuge. However, other stages leave no administrative record: a period staying with friends, a series of threatening text messages prompting women to relocate, a resignation from a job giving no explanation. One stage which used to be recorded comprehensively was accessing services in England provided under the Supporting People Programme (Department for Communities and Local Government and University of St Andrews, Centre for Housing Research 2012), which ran from 2003-2011, and these administrative data have been used in the wider research (Bowstead 2015a; Bowstead 2019b).

Only the women themselves could trace all the stages of their literal and emotional journeys, and it would often be unsafe for them to disclose this to anyone, for fear of being tracked down again. It is therefore a challenge to research such journeys: to uncover the scale, the patterns and the processes; which helps explain the focus of much domestic violence research on the nodes of the journeys – leaving, staying in a refuge, rehousing – and the relative neglect of the journeys between such nodes (Bowstead 2017a). This article builds on the England-wide research, which has been published elsewhere (Bowstead 2015a; Bowstead 2017a; Bowstead 2019b), and includes discussion of the roles and work of women's refuges (Bowstead 2015b; Bowstead 2019a), to focus in on the journeys – the travelling – and the

issue of the means of transport by which women make these journeys. There is no large-scale administrative record of this aspect of women's journeys, but at the individual scale, interviews with 20 women provided details of their journeys; and these data of location, distances, reasons for move and means of transport provide key evidence for this article. It is a small non-representative sample – just over 80 journey segments within England and Wales, and including stages abroad. However, it provides detail to start to consider the role of public and private transport in women's escapes from domestic violence.

2. Research on women's domestic violence journeys

The overall research uses mixed methods to achieve a multi-faceted and multi-scalar analysis of the journeys. It therefore brings together qualitative 'small data' with the relatively large data of administrative records (of Supporting People services across England); as called for by Kwan and Schwanen (2016, 252) in their overview of the direction of geographies of mobility. D'Andrea et al (2011) also highlight how multi-scalar and critical methodologies are needed to expand the analytical and interventional possibilities of a mobilities research agenda. The large scale mapping and statistical analysis has been discussed in detail elsewhere (Bowstead 2015a; Bowstead 2019b), and it was interim findings from that analysis which prompted the detailed discussion of means of transport in the interviews, as part of an iterative research process.

Mapping the England-wide administrative data of women accessing services revealed a mass of largely individualised journeys (rather than major flows between particular local authorities), forming a pattern of spatial churn with most local authorities having a net rate of

leaving/arriving of around zero. However, major urban areas were all found to be net leaving, in terms of women accessing services due to domestic violence.

The interviews formed a non-representative sample, but women were recruited with the aim of as broad a range as possible in terms of demographic characteristics, and characteristics of places on their domestic violence journeys. The women were aged 19 to 56 at the time of first interview and 60 per cent of them had dependent children. They came from a wide range of ethnic origins, including White British, White Other, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan within the Asian/Asian British category, and both Caribbean and African within the Black/Black British category. They had left places in all six Rural-Urban Classifications (DEFRA 2009), and in ten out of the twelve Area Group Classifications (ONS 2001), so provide evidence on a range of types of places of leaving. They also had travelled to places in five out of the six Rural-Urban Classifications, and six Area Group Classifications, including the two not previously travelled from. The interviews were carried out via the specialist domestic violence service provider Refuge in a range of locations in the Midlands, London and Southern England, and a total of 20 women were interviewed, with 14 being interviewed again at a later stage of their journeys. Recruitment via a service provider ensured that all interviewees had access to support, and the study was approved via the ethical procedures of both the service provider and the university.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed and content and thematic analysis was carried out within Nvivo software. Open descriptive coding was brought together into links and hierarchies to identify emergent themes, and representative quotations were identified to describe these themes. Interviewees also provided a log of time and location data for all their journeys since first leaving their abusive partner, providing quantitative data for journey-

graph analysis (Bowstead 2017a) and for the analysis on means of transport which is the focus of this article. In the context of their journeys of escape from an abuser who might still be trying to track them down, it was not known if the interviewees would be prepared to trust the researcher with such details. It was therefore important to situate this data collection within the wider context of the interview, and ensure that women could comfortably withhold such information. One woman declined to give her journey information in the first interview, but was happy to provide it in a second interview some months later, suggesting a process of building trust within the research process. In total, the 20 women provided details of all the stages of their journeys, from first leaving the abuser: a total of 87 journey segments.

The mixed methods approach of the overall project meant that the themes were drawn out across the whole range of data sources to identify connections and contradictions in an “integrative logic” (Mason 2006, 6). Locating the individual accounts within a range of data sources enabled analysis to explore women’s journeys at a range of scales from individual to local, regional and national. For this article, quantitative analysis of the journey segments, specifically focusing on the means of transport used, is explored further via the thematic analysis and representative quotations from the women.

In the next section, three key findings on the role of public and private transport are outlined: the limited role of public transport in domestic violence journeys; the role of private transport in disabled women’s journeys; and the role of others’ assistance in journeys from rural areas. These empirical findings are then contextualised into a more conceptual focus on key aspects of mobility which are exemplified and amplified by this distinctive forced internal migration. The conclusions draw together the empirical findings with this wider conceptual field to consider how this hidden mobility speaks to other concepts and meanings of movement.

3. Means of transport and domestic violence journeys

A focus on the means of transport used by women escaping domestic violence was prompted by the iterative nature of the research analysis. As mentioned earlier, mapping the England-wide administrative data of women accessing services revealed a mass of largely individualised journeys, and that major urban areas were all found to be net leaving, in terms of women accessing services due to domestic violence. It was therefore decided to explore the possible role of means of transport in providing explanations, by asking the interviewed women for quantitative and category data on their means of transport, distances, and reasons for each relocation, in addition to their accounts which were analysed qualitatively.

Within the 87 journey segments travelled by 20 women and 19 children there were few associations between characteristics of people, places, means of transport and distance that were statistically significant (Chi-Square test, $p > 0.05$), which indicates a similar degree of diversity of journeys to that found in the administrative data. There was no statistically significant association of means of transport or distance travelled with age of women, whether or not they had children with them, their ethnic origin, or the employment status or housing tenure they were leaving. This suggests that factors such as individual circumstances, and a more complex intersectionality, are more important than broad demographic characteristics in determining such journeys (Bowstead 2017b, 113). However, there are three statistically significant findings which will be discussed further: that under a third of journey segments were made by public transport, and these tended to be longer distances (see Figure 1); that journeys by disabled women were more likely to be by private

transport, and that journeys from rural areas were more likely to be with the assistance of others (see Figure 2).

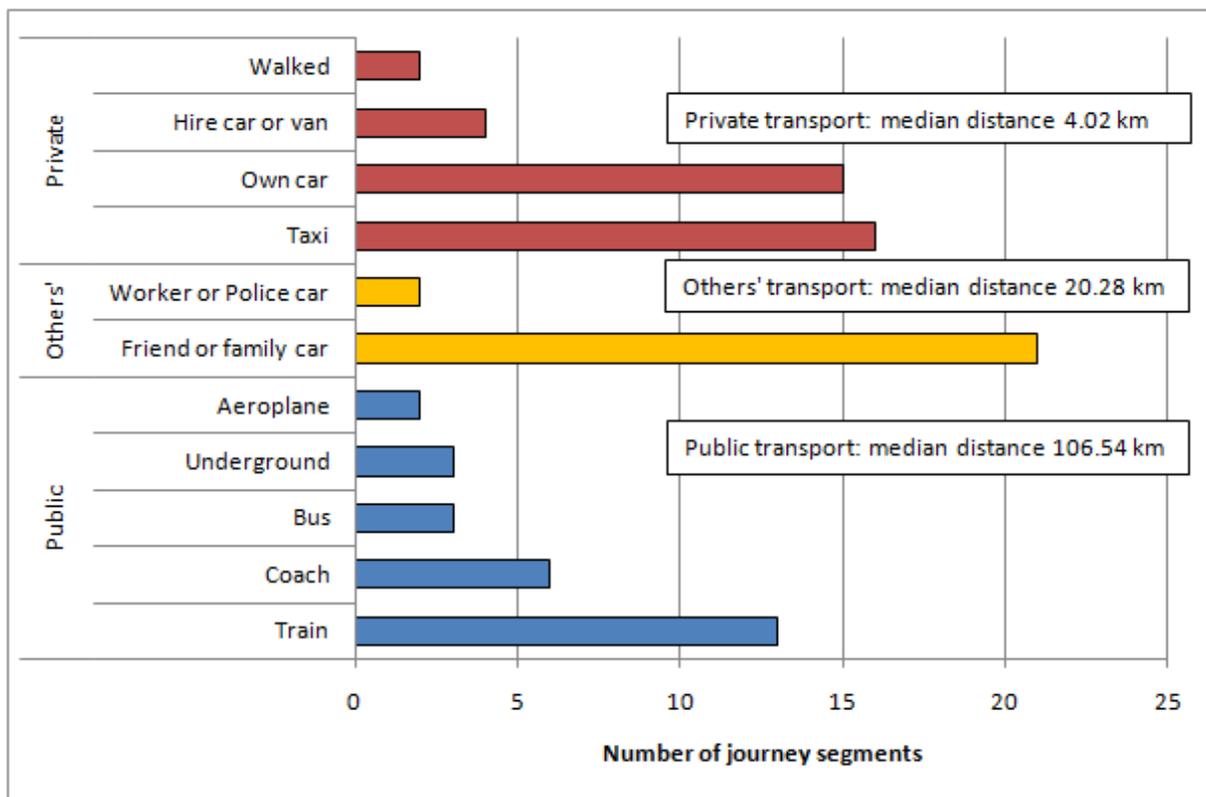


Figure 1. Journey segments by public, private and others' means of transport

3.1. The limited role of public transport in domestic violence journeys

The pattern of all major cities in England being consistently net leaving in terms of women accessing domestic violence services can be contextualised by considering the limited role of public transport in the interviewed women's journeys. Compared to many other countries, England has a relatively well-developed transport system (Champion et al. 1998, 134), and public transport was used particularly for longer journey segments. In the past, transport research on gender has tended to focus on a limited range of types of journeys, such as journey-to-work (Law 1999), and the intention here is to discuss the means of transport within a more holistic mobilities framing (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Cresswell 2011).

Research by Patel et al (Patel, Balmer, and Pleasence 2008, 2009) on seeking advice service assistance found that people without private motorised transport were significantly more likely not to seek help, suggesting that private transport reduces barriers to help-seeking. Private transport implies enhanced agency, and Dant (2014) has discussed the positioning of drivers and passengers in terms of control over the journey. However, a private car can also be isolating, with the anxiety of having to trace an unfamiliar route to an unknown destination. Talking about her journey, Gloria¹ explained, *“It wasn’t difficult because I had a car; so I could just use my car.”* But she was relieved that she was offered a refuge space not too far away, *“I was dreading to drive to Birmingham – because if they found a place there; and that’s how it was. If they call Birmingham and there’s a place, they send you there.”* Though she had the autonomy of her own private car for her and her son, she had no autonomy about where she could find a refuge space, because of the lack of services and vacancies.

Maud and her teenage daughter drove to a town on the South Coast where she knew nobody, and therefore felt she would be safe from her abusive partner. However, in the stress of the situation, she was unable to find the meeting place. *“I went down there; but I ended up in the wrong place. I was supposed to meet the refuge worker, but I got lost – my brain not working properly, and I’d left my directions behind – so I’d gone the wrong way. So I was two hours late and I’d missed the lady I was supposed to meet – it wasn’t her fault.”*

Helen’s ex-partner repeatedly tracked her down via following her from her workplace after they separated. Having her own car meant that Helen was able to retain some of her possessions during multiple moves, though she felt she was always under surveillance. Initially she moved fairly locally, and on one occasion realised that her ex-partner had spotted

her in her car, *“I drove round and round and round the town trying to lose him. I didn’t even know my way around the town, so I got the satnav going – ‘please turn around when possible’ and all this! I’m going round and round and round the town trying to lose him at traffic lights; and dart down another side road, and what have you. And eventually lost him – and knew for sure that I had lost him – and then finished the journey and came here. But now I won’t go there because I’m frightened that he’s followed me there – followed me that far – and I won’t meet up with my daughter again now because I’m frightened that he’ll do the same thing.”*

Finally, she gave up her job and moved to a refuge in an unknown place as the only way to be safe. To get there she had information to drive to a place to meet a refuge worker, *“I had a car – my daughter gave me ten pound to put petrol in; and we’re going – is ten pound going to get me there? She said – well I hope it is as it’s all I’ve got! Bless her. But it was enough to get me here. And I just thought – pile the car up and go. And we had a look on the internet when they sent – we had an idea of roughly where it was, because we had a post code for the meeting point; so we put that into the internet and we had a look. And we’d never heard of it – so we thought good! [laughs] But even then there’s that scary part – when you get to the meeting point, and you’re waiting for the phone call; to say – have you got there? - to tell you where to go next. You think – I could be sat in this car all night waiting for somebody. It takes courage. I don’t think people realise how much courage it takes.”*

Journeys by private transport were therefore experienced as autonomous, but also nerve-racking and isolated. A recognisable car brought the risk of surveillance by the abuser, but, in general, private transport facilitated retaining possessions and having more control over

particularly the timing of journeys. The particular association of private transport with disabled women's journeys will be discussed in the next section 3.2, after considering women's experiences of public transport and others' transport.

Women's journeys by public transport also tended to be nerve-racking and isolated, but they tended to represent greater material losses as women could take fewer possessions with them, especially if they were accompanied by young children. Julien Rosa found herself travelling at rush hour with her two boys who were 3 and 7, "*The time I moved from [city on south coast of England] to here it was about four or five I think. And it was when people come from work and the train is packed and everything*". She said "*I found it difficult because all your things, and all your bags; not like travelling just with one bag when you're going for a holiday or something; but carrying all your stuff. And one baby buggy and all this – it's really difficult to travel.*" The other passengers were a source of stress for Julien Rosa, but there is also the potential for interactions and connectedness on public transport (Te Brömmelstroet et al. 2017). Deborah was struggling with the needs of her children, aged 3 and 5, as she travelled from London to a city in the Midlands, "*On the train I'd fed my son but he kept on asking for food – and the food was in the luggage and I couldn't get it, so he was crying and crying. People helped me – but it was difficult – people helped me push the pram and took the luggage for me.*" At her destination – a place she had never heard of before – she found that there wasn't the assistance she had hoped for, "*They said someone was coming to pick me up, but when I phoned they said I had to get a taxi. I had to go out of the station to reach it, and I was scared to leave the kids alone and get all the luggage – or leave the luggage...*" Women's lack of control over such train journeys meant that they might travel at the most difficult times, and often the most expensive fares. In the stress of leaving London, Deborah also ended up with the wrong ticket, "*At the station I asked for a*

single ticket, but the kids were struggling and it was difficult and I couldn't hear – and they ended up giving me a return. I didn't realise until they gave me the tickets, and I just had to pay and take it. I was paying for myself – I got three hundred pounds from my cousin and I had to pay from that.”

In addition to private and public transport, many journey segments were travelled with help of others, either the private cars of family or friends, or occasionally a professional's car.

Louise's father rescued her when her abusive partner had locked her in the house, *“I'm panicking and I phone my dad; and I said – look, he's going to come back at two o'clock in the morning; he's locked me in the house - he's taken the keys. I can't get out, so can you come and get me, because I don't want to be here. So that was about nine; and I think he got to me about half past nine. And because he's a locksmith he opened the door – it's quite handy really! [laughs] – he opened the door, changed the lock on it; took me back to his with some clothes and stuff.”* Others' transport therefore frequently provided the autonomy of private transport, with the added support and assistance of a relative, friend or a worker. Its particular association with journeys from rural areas will be discussed in section 3.3.

3.2. The role of private transport in disabled women's journeys

Studies have highlighted the additional barriers often faced by disabled women trying to escape domestic violence (Hague et al. 2008), as well as recognising that the abuse itself is often a cause of disability. Research by Women's Aid highlighted that up to a third of physical and sensory disability of refuge residents was a result of the abuse, as well as three-quarters of the mental health disability which women experienced (Women's Aid 2009). In addition to practical barriers, disabled women may be viewed as vulnerable, which may lead

a violent man to target his abuse in particular, controlling ways, and may affect how women are responded to by authorities and services (Hollomotz 2012; Edwards 2013). In considering means of transport, the physicality of journeys is a key element in thinking about disability as a factor. Parveen was temporarily disabled by having broken her leg whilst staying in temporary accommodation: she had become trapped in a bathroom and was unable to summon any help, so ended up jumping out of a window. Beyond the typical difficulties of a train journey with a broken leg, she talked about how she was unable to reassure her one year old daughter by having her on her lap, *“I was on two crutches, so it was very difficult. My daughter wanted to be on my lap all the time, but I couldn’t – and I had bags and everything.”* When she arrived at her destination she was entirely dependent on being met, *“I didn’t see anyone at the train station – so the train staff helped me, and I was in a wheelchair. And then the refuge staff came after about five minutes.”*

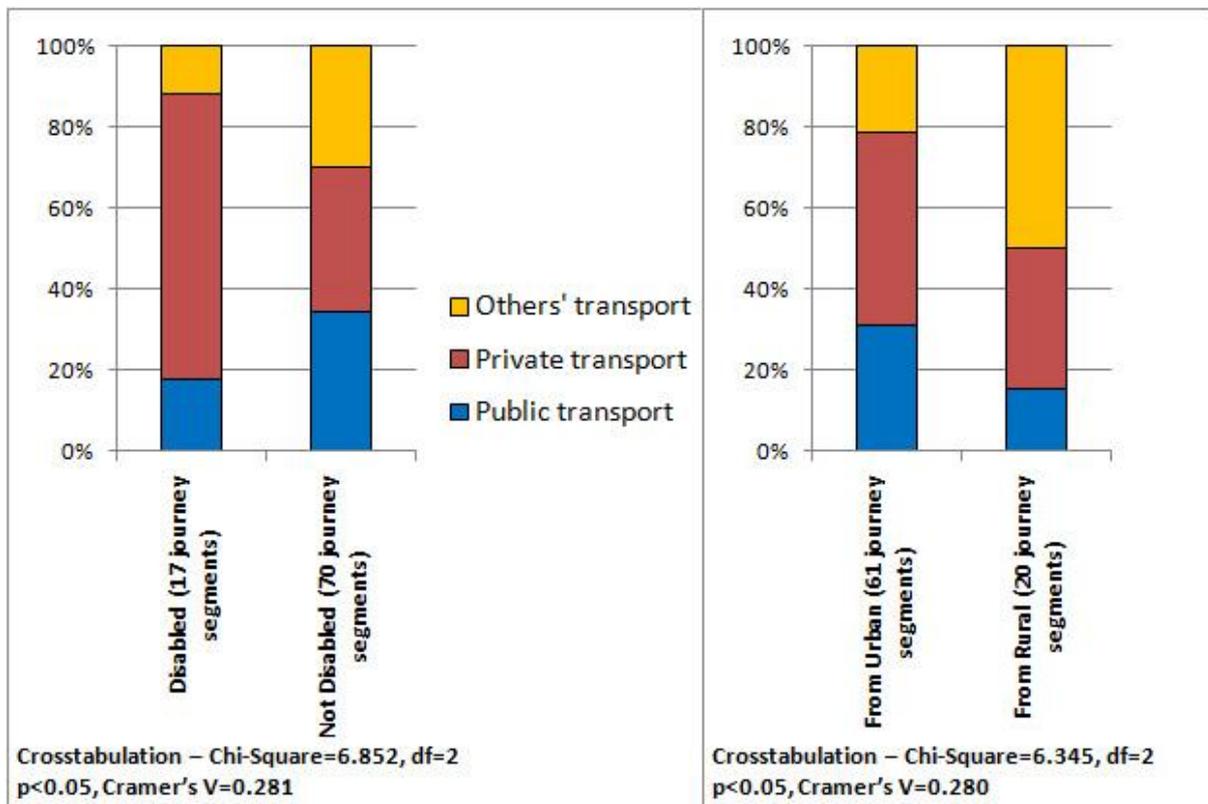


Figure 2. Journey segments by Disabled/Not Disabled women and from Rural and Urban areas by public, private and others’ means of transport

Journey segments by disabled women were significantly more likely to be by private transport rather than either public transport or the help of others (Figure 2), suggesting that disabled women who manage to escape abusive partners may need to have such independence. Maud talked about how she felt her car was essential, *“I need transport because I’m not well – I can’t stand at a bus stop, I can’t stand at a train station; even if I’m sitting down the cold gets into me and I can’t move – because of the arthritis. So – I have to have a car – it’s not that I’m spoilt, it’s a necessity – it’s part of me, a car!”* She had initially left her partner in Spain and returned to family in England, before staying at two different refuges because of fear of her ex-partner tracing her via knowing where her relatives lived. The numerous journeys had made her disability worse, *“I’m waiting for the MRI anyway; that’s due in March – he told me I’ve got a thrombosis vein, so that’s stopping the blood from leaving my leg; obviously my discs, which is the sciatica – and I’ve torn a ligament in my ankle; which is not repairing, because I’m putting the weight on it; and because of the blood flow. So – hence I have crutches now.”* At the time of a second interview when she had moved to private rented accommodation in a new area, she outlined some of the financial costs of transporting herself and her possessions over the previous year, *“I’ve used my daughter’s savings – borrowed off my son, off my mother. I owe my mother – phew – nearly five grand; and my mother’s bought me a car because my car blew up last week – so – three and a half grand. And she asked me last night – did I want – rather than saving up for a new car; so – take some pressure off me; because she knows I’m worried about the money.”*

The labour and cost of trying to retain your possessions on the move was a frequent theme in the interviews. The association of journeys by disabled women with the use of private

transport may reflect the additional barriers to their mobility and the independence necessary for their escapes.

3.3. The role of others' assistance in journeys from rural areas

The assistance of others' transport in women's domestic violence journeys was highlighted across many interviews, with the private car of a friend or family member being the most common means of transport for a journey segment. Journey segments from rural areas were significantly more likely to be by others' transport, especially friends or family, rather than by public or private transport (Figure 2). Research on domestic violence in rural areas, in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, has often emphasised the limited public transport and the lack of services (Brunell 2005; Little, Panelli, and Kraack 2005; McCarry and Williamson 2009; Owen and Carrington 2015; Peek-Asa et al. 2011; Ragusa 2012; Wendt 2009; Wuerch et al. 2016), however it has rarely looked at the means of transport women actually use. Little (2016, 483) highlights that "the rural offers particular challenges for those experiencing control through entrapment", and that "the simple scarcity of public transport, the distances between places and the lengthy response times for emergency services may prevent victims from fleeing". Whilst a rural-urban binary is simplistic, Cloke et al (2003, 31) defend its usage, arguing that "the 'rural' continues to be a spatial category which informs the geographical imagination in public discourses".

Some literature also argues for the distinctiveness of rural cultures, whether in terms of gendered power relations, such as "the entrenched nature of rural patriarchy" (Pruitt 2008, 347) and "the ways in which rural space and place is male-dominated" (Donkersloot 2012, 578), or in terms of "insular and inward looking" communities (Little 2016, 483). Duncan

(1996, 133) highlights that “women from rural areas may have to travel long distances to find a shelter”, but also that depending on the help of strangers “can be highly embarrassing and stigmatizing”. However, the interviewed women had all sought the help of strangers in services, with some being transported by professionals for segments of their journeys. Anna miscarried as a result of physical assault from her partner, and was given a lift by a social worker to a refuge, *“I have some belongings; and it was [refuge worker] she phone me and I say - to be honest it was a few hours after my miscarriage and I don’t want contact with anybody... but I couldn’t manage on my own [...] and she contact social service and they take me with car to the refuge. So they help me.”*

More commonly, and particularly from rural areas, women were helped by family or friends. Whilst some were leaving rural areas initially, others had later segments of their journey to or from temporary accommodation in rural areas, providing a complexity of rural mobilities rather than a linear migration to or from rural areas (Milbourne and Kitchen 2014). At the point of initial escape from the abusive partner, it was often not safe for family or friends to be involved, and women protected them by not telling them details that might put them at risk. Violet even had to explain this risk to the police, *“I was so scared of him; so frightened just to get in the car and drive off somewhere. I thought he’d always find me; and that he’d be violent towards my family if I did go – because I’ve tried many times before. And when the police came they said – you can go back to your parents; and I said to them – no, there’s no way, because he always finds me. You should go to a friend – but I said I don’t want to put this on any of my friends”*. However, at later stages of women’s journeys, family or friends were more frequently able and willing to help, such as Elizabeth’s adult son and her elderly mother, *“He [son] had a car, yes – he came up from [South Coast city] so it wasn’t easy. And my mother helped – well, she didn’t help because she’s too old – but they had a*

car and they put bits and bobs in that. But without that I'd have been stuck – it would have been a taxi driver and it would have cost me at least thirty pound by taxi. So I was lucky – my son did it back and forth.”

The role of others in assisting domestic violence journeys was highlighted in women's experiences, whether it affected the timing of an escape, or the possibility of planning to retain possessions, for example. The particular association with journeys from rural areas suggests both that other options may be more limited, and that others' assistance may counteract possible isolation at crucial stages.

4. Concepts and meanings of this distinctive mobility

So what can be drawn more widely from this small-scale empirical investigation of women's means of transport on their domestic violence journeys? The significant scale and churning patterns of women's domestic violence journeys indicates a forced migration creating internally displaced persons (Bowstead 2015a). However, at each stage there are degrees of force and agency in women's relocation (Bowstead 2017b), which engage with a mobilities literature which explores the entanglement of physical movement with the meanings ascribed to such movement and the embodied practices of movement (Cresswell 2010). It is therefore possible to build on these empirical findings to focus on three wider concerns discussed below which may be constrained or enabled through mobility, thereby compounding or counteracting the abuse: control and agency, personal possessions, and the help of others.

4.1. Control and agency

Spatial mobility cannot necessarily be equated with freedom (Flamm and Kaufmann 2006), and Dant (2014, 370) has emphasised the importance of intentionality in identifying drivers and passengers i.e. degrees of control over the purpose and progress of movement. Adey (2006, 90) argues for a “relational politics of (im)mobilities” which highlights how mobilities do not happen in isolation from social context and relationships (Adey et al. 2014, 14). Some mobilities work explores the “fertile middle ground between mobilities and forced migration” (Gill, Caletrió, and Mason 2011, 301), including the role of state mobilities in forcing or constraining movement (Mountz 2011a), and this highlights the entanglements of mobilities and power (Jensen 2011). Within abusive relationships women’s mobility is often a key site of control, with women being forced to be mobile, or immobile, and required to account for their every movement. Anna was constantly questioned by her partner about her journeys to and from work, “It was – *where have you been...* Because from my work it was possible for me to walk or to go by bus [...] It was – *oh, why did you prefer to walk? Did you meet someone? I just feel like I want to walk. No – why are you fifteen minutes late?*”. During the course of her marriage, Violet’s husband insisted on moving house, “*I was moved furthest – furthest away from my parents, my friends – so really really remote spot. If he’d take my car then there was nowhere even to go to a shop in walking distance – it was too far. So I felt really isolated.*”

Their journeys of escape can therefore be understood both as forced by the abuse, and starting to take back some control. Interviewed women felt forced to leave, but had different degrees of control over times and places on the journey, which related to policy and service responses (Bowstead 2017a) as well as the options and finances of the means of transport which is focused on here. Cathy had spent most of her adult life in the United States and had no knowledge of her rights or services in the UK, therefore her priority was to save enough

money to be able to finance her journeys and accommodation. She left and returned to her abusive partner more than once, each time “*gathering together information*”; and discovered that a friend was similarly experiencing abuse and planning to leave. Together they saved money to enable both of them to leave, “*And at one point she [friend] turned round and she said – we need to speed up the situation; so then I went to her house and claimed Housing Benefit – so this was to get enough to get her out. And so that’s what I did, and – though everything was going to her house she wasn’t – she had access to my account if anything happened to me, but she never touched a penny of it. We knew it was serious. [...] So basically that’s what we did – I came to London, and she went back to Poland.*”

Others, like Louise, had no opportunity to plan or prepare, but the timing was that she collected her money to enable her to finance a public transport journey, “*I can’t actually say that I actually thought that I was going to leave. I mean I got up, I dressed my daughter in her uniform – because it was a school day – dressed myself, got breakfast; just like an ordinary day. And I went to Tesco’s to draw out money – because it was a pay day – and then I was going to take her to school. And instead of coming out of Tesco’s and going straight to the school, I ended up turning about and just ending up at a bus stop; which would then take me to the coach station. Once I was in the coach station, I was already buying a ticket to come to where my dad lives; and it just kind of hit me when I was already on the coach really that – oh god - I’m going! [laughs] Once it actually sunk in it was quite a relief; because it was like freedom – you know, I could breathe.*”

As discussed earlier, women’s journeys by private transport can be understood as more autonomous, but, if they are the stage of accessing a service, they are dependent on being able to find a vacancy. Often, women have limited choices, and may initially be indifferent

or even unaware of their destination, so long as it is safe. It was while Violet was on the train that she discovered a change of plan, *“Well, the place that they told me I was going – erm – when I got here it wasn’t that place. [...] it was like, every so often on the train I’d get a missed call because there was no signal; and then you’ve got to go here – it was all very kind of secretive, but then it was all right. [laughs]”*. Security of locations of refuges, and the risk of being followed by the abuser, means that women often do not know the directions when they set off, with information being provided en route by mobile phone. In general, mobile phones have been characterised as enabling everyday life and mobility (Peters, Kloppenburg, and Wyatt 2010), and as making it possible for travellers or migrants to take home with them on the move. However, they also enable surveillance (Albrechtslund and Lauritsen 2013), and in abusive relationships can provide a further tool of coercive control (Stark 2007), enabling ongoing abuse even after leaving. As she travelled on the coach to London, Louise found that her partner *“was following me with my phone – leaving messages, texting – just saying – you’re going to make it worse on yourself, you better come back, blah, blah, blah. And I just ignored the messages – and some of the messages that he was sending that was horrible, I’m sending to his mum – to show her what he was sending me. And she just basically said – you’re doing the right thing, just – you know – just ignore it.”*

On their public transport journeys, women were hiding in plain view, amongst the travelling public, but unable to plan the most effective arrangements, and, unlike frequent travellers (Bissell 2009), unfamiliar with the layout and changes required on public transport. Aliya had always had a car, but had to leave it behind, *“it was the first time that I’d actually been on the bus. With my suitcases and everything. But I suppose it was interesting [laughs] – I enjoyed it! I realised that I don’t have to rely on someone else, or the car; I’ve got legs, and I can take the train or the bus!”* She was therefore experiencing her new reliance on public

transport (in London) as an increasing sense of independence and autonomy. Faith similarly explained how she was learning to travel around London, *“I’d never lived by myself since I came to this country – I’d never lived by myself in the UK – so I didn’t get to do anything by myself. I didn’t learn about going on trains, going on buses – all by myself; I just didn’t do that. But now I’ve learned how the DLR works, how the Overground works – I had to study it all – look on the internet. When I was first travelling I had to write down my journeys – just in case I missed anything on my way – so I could check. And if there was a problem on the line, I just couldn’t find my way! Now I can find my way everywhere – even without going on TFL [website]!”* Women’s narratives of the different stages and means of transport on their domestic violence journeys can therefore be seen to highlight the interplay of control and agency in their lives and mobilities.

4.2. Personal possessions on the move

As discussed earlier, many women lose or leave behind possessions on the way, as their means of transport, or their safety, give no opportunity of packing, retrieving or storing their things. Such financial and material losses compound women’s experiences of the abuse, whether in terms of treasured possessions, or in terms of the economic burden of starting again without basic household necessities. Possessions may be left behind because of a woman’s lack of control over the timing of an emergency move, and the lack of access to private transport meaning that she can only take what she can carry. Women with children can sometimes get financial assistance from the authorities, by means of a travel warrant, but others, like Violet, were initially offered nothing, *“I said to them [Police] – well, look I’ve got some money – I never had a huge amount, but I had about a hundred pound – look, can you just put me in a hotel anywhere? I’ve just got to go. And then the policeman was like –*

no, there's nowhere you can go." Maud attempted to retain her and her daughter's personal possessions as well as furniture, but was counting the cost of both removal vehicles and storage, *"I've got stuff coming back to Britain from Spain; it's all been in storage, but it's actually on a van now; and that's over six hundred pounds. And I need to pick up stuff from Wales – because I've stuff in storage in Wales as well – and that's three hundred and eighty; so it's like – a thousand pounds!"*

Women talk of shifting their priorities from material things towards people, as a way of coping with the losses on the journey. Violet explained, *"you have to give up a lot – but at the end of the day, so long as you've got your kid, what more do you want? [...] Your job, things like that; all the material things – car, clothes, furniture – but you just start again."* In research with internally displaced people in Sudan, Motasim and Heynen (2011, 63) highlight the role of "portable objects of identity" as people refocus their sense of home. They characterise this new sense of home as a "mobile symbolic habitat" that can be "taken to the next place on the next journey" (2011, 43). Similarly, Jenny tried to envisage a way of retaining a home whilst still making her necessary journeys to safety, *"It's just been eight months here, eight months there, and I'm thinking – I might as well get a caravan and just ride around in it! [laughs] At least it's on wheels and I can move – and I'm in one house!"* She had been able to store some of her possessions with family, *"it's like I've used my nan's house and I just feel I've used it like a dumping ground; the washing machine's there and everything. And I'm like – nan, I will get it out soon, I will get it out!"*

Though Helen had her own car for the initial stages of her journey, she no longer had it at the time of a second interview when she had moved to a social housing flat. However, she had been able to realise it as an asset, *"I had to sell it. I couldn't afford to run it – there was just*

no way I could afford to run it; and then – of course – not having a Community Care Grant – I could just sell the car and use that money to help me... So it did help.” Moving to the flat, she had the help of friends to move her things out of the refuge, *“we ended up with three cars. Despite the fact that I didn’t have any furniture, despite the fact that my room was the smallest one in the refuge – it still took us two journeys! [laughs] – boxes upon boxes of stuff.”*

In contrast, Violet had left her car behind with her ex-husband, and celebrated at the point when she was able to afford a car again, *“I saved up and it’s the best thing I ever done! I feel like moving in it to be honest! [laughs] It’s given me a whole new lease of life – and it really cheered me up; I think I needed that.”* Being in a refuge in a very rural area, it enabled her much more freedom to go places with her son, *“It’s so much easier for us to go out now – rather than we were just having to go to the local parks; or the buses – and the buses around here are not good anyway – like hourly.”* She remembered how driving used to be associated with carrying out chores for her abusive husband, *“I’m not in a rush any more – I haven’t got to be back to cook dinner, or ironing, or pick up dry cleaning, or pick up wages, or do this or do that... All I was was a skivvy – and now I’m me, and I’ve got time to – I haven’t got to drive up and down motorways and picking people up; and cooking and cleaning and all that. I can go to the shop and not be on a time limit; or just walk around and take in nature.”*

Thinking about what she had lost and gained on her journey she said, *“We had a home but it weren’t our home; and it weren’t a happy place. So you can live in a shoebox and make it your home.”*

4.3. The help of others

The help of others on different stages of domestic violence journeys can be related both to the gendered nature of the abuse, and the consequent barriers to be overcome in the mobilities of escape. Peters et al (2010) discuss the ways in which people draw on a range of resources to manage everyday mobility, whereas Dobbs (2007, 85) highlights a continuing gender division of transport which means “the majority of women are stuck in the slow lane”. Gender is clearly a key axis of inequality in terms of the capacity and resources of mobility (Uteng and Cresswell 2016), with Sheller and Urry (2016, 15) highlighting “differential mobility capabilities”. They argue that mobilising the mobilities paradigm seeks a fundamental recasting of social science, including how “network capital varies between social groups with such capital sustaining relations of power over time”.

Because of the issues of power and control within an abusive household, household-level information on income or wealth does not indicate the financial resources available to the woman. In the relationship, some of the interviewed women had assets, savings, a house and a car, but were unable to draw on these at the point of escaping the abuse; and therefore needed the help of others. Elizabeth’s husband controlled all the family finances, so she explained, *“I had to borrow some money from a friend. She lent me the money – and they said to me from here [refuge] – we’ll hold the room until Friday. This was the Thursday. I had no money at all – I had no access to any money – so I asked her; and she said – here’s the fare, what are you waiting for!”* She felt that money at that moment was crucial, and asked *“how do you get out, if you’ve got no money yourself? I couldn’t certainly have done it if not.”*

Larance and Porter (2004) highlight how an abuser may specifically isolate his partner to reduce her social capital and increase her dependency, and thereby reduce her chances of

escape. Financial, social and mobility capital (Dant 2014, 373) are all important, therefore, in enabling domestic violence journeys, and the help of others is increasingly recognised (Klein 2012; Latta and Goodman 2011; Parker 2015) as significant in building or rebuilding such capital. At some journey stages, the assistance was from professionals or authorities, but for others, such help was either not known about, or would not have been sufficiently timely. Moving into an independent tenancy, Jenny said, *“It wasn’t too hard because my friend – they’ve got a seven-seater; so – luckily – it was a really tight squeeze but we just squeezed it all in. And it just saved me so much money on getting a delivery van.”* She had not been advised that she could have got a grant from the benefits service, *“But I never actually realised that I could have got a lot of help with the Community Care Grant for the delivery. But I think – if I’d have known – because of the state around the time I was going, there wouldn’t have been time to write it out – the form – and get a decision. So – where it was five days – I just thought to myself I’d never get it in time. But luckily – I was lucky enough to have someone to help me; because I don’t know what people would do if they didn’t, you know.”*

5. Conclusions

The gendered mobilities of women escaping violent partners can be considered both as a distinctive process, with practical, emotional and policy implications, and for what it can exemplify or contribute to wider concepts of mobility. The research findings discussed above highlight the important role of private transport in women’s domestic violence journeys. This helps explain the diverse and individualised relocations across the country rather than more concentrated flows along public transport routes and between cities which might have been expected. Analysis of the characteristics of different journey segments for a small sample of

interviewed women indicates few specific associations. However, there is a greater likelihood of using private transport by disabled women which highlights their need for independent resources to be able to escape, and the role of friends and family in assisting journeys from rural areas unpicks some generalisations about isolation and lack of public transport in rural areas. These findings, exemplified and amplified by the insights and experiences of the interviewed women, contribute to a greater focus on these hidden domestic violence journeys, and the meanings, experiences and embodied practices within the physical movement (Cresswell 2010, 19). The journeys are highly gendered, involving tens of thousands of women and children in England every year, and call to mind the metaphor of feminist campaigning as a women's movement (Clarsen 2014), in highlighting that women are trying to get to a better place.

Both the large administrative datasets and the interview data analysed here are from the women who have been able to escape abusive partners, and so the analysis provides insights on the characteristics and practicalities of journey stages, rather than being able to draw conclusions on women who are not able to move. Key elements of how the mobility can compound or counteract the impact of the abuse are highlighted through discussion of control and agency on the move, the retention or loss of personal possessions, and the difference made by receiving the help of others. Women's domestic violence journeys are thereby contextualised within wider mobilities research, by highlighting how the dynamics of power and control in abusive relationships are played out in constraining or forcing women's mobility and escape. Equation of private transport with autonomy and freedom is complicated by its potential to be isolating during nerve-racking journeys of escape, and by a frequent lack of autonomy over accessing services as a destination. In contrast, a sense of freedom and independence in the use of public transport is highlighted by women in areas of

comprehensive public transport networks. Multiple stages of forced relocation, over which women may have little control, also change women's relationships to things and places as they cope with material losses and manage their investment in temporary possessions and locations. The help of others is highlighted as a key factor in enabling journey stages, including both friends and family, and the role of professionals and authorities. Parallels with internally displaced persons and refugees in other countries are clear, raising questions of the role of the state in mitigating or minimising the displacement and losses of its citizens. The argument by Mountz (2011b, 385) that "states manipulate geography to prevent and hide asylum-seekers", can potentially be applied to these displaced women and children within the UK, who are denied rights and securities during often years on the move. The wider research project, of which this article is a part, involves developing policy and practice responses on how these fragmented journeys could be 'journeyscaped' into less damaging displacements (Bowstead 2018).

This article is therefore something of a response to Mountz's call (2011b, 385) that "geographers must stitch together the global archipelago of exclusion" in its highlighting of the exclusions which result from inequalities in capacities and resources of mobility for these women on the move due to domestic violence. As a result, it contributes to discussions on the mobilisation of a mobilities paradigm (Büscher, Sheller, and Tyfield 2016; Sheller and Urry 2016) in applying mobility concepts to the often hidden churn of domestic violence journeys in England.

Notes:

¹ Quotations are referenced by pseudonyms chosen by the interviewees.

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