



Pilmeny Women's Health and Well Being Group



“I don't want to talk about football, pigeons or the races!”

Women's Health & Wellbeing Issues in Leith Research Report

2009 - 201

Summary

An NHS Lothian Community Health Development grant of £1,500 was awarded in November 2008 to Pilmeny Development project, with a view to improving the health and wellbeing of women in the local area of Leith. This report outlines the results of a small research project undertaken in the area, and suggests how the grant can be used to improve these women's experiences of health and wellbeing.

The grant was used in part to carry out research to identify key health and wellbeing concerns of women in Leith, who experience poorer health and greater health inequalities than the majority of the wider population. This was achieved by developing and circulating a questionnaire that could be filled in by local women; this was carried out by members of the small women's group being developed at Pilmeny Development Project. Members contributed to the drafting of the report and to the circulation of questionnaires. The questionnaires were then evaluated by local women, and used to develop suggestions for activities and issues that the Pilmeny Women's Positive Health & Wellbeing Group, already in development at PDP, could focus on in order to improve local women's everyday lives.

37 women took part in the research, ranging from young women of 13, up to older women aged over 60. However, despite the vast difference in age and situation, researchers found that similar health issues and concerns were voiced in all the questionnaires. This is disappointing, as it suggests that local service providers are not listening to local women, or providing them with opportunities to speak. However, this can also be seen in a positive light, as it allows Pilmeny Development Project to address these key issues which are important to many women, and to appeal to a diverse range of local women.

The results are considered in more detail in this report, and key findings are highlighted. These findings have been used to suggest ways that Pilmeny Development Project can develop strategies to improve local women's health and wellbeing, with an emphasis on 'self help', and for this reason draws on suggestions made by local women themselves.

The questionnaires also painted a picture of how women perceive their local area, and how aware they are of the resources available to them. The results were quite bleak; however, again they provide a starting point for Pilmeny Development Project to address these issues, by helping and encouraging local women to take positive steps to change their situation.

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Introduction

Pilmey Development Project (PDP) has been operating in the Lorne Area of Leith since 1979. It is managed by local residents and is funded by the City of Edinburgh Council and through its own fundraising efforts. It employs two community workers (1 full time & 1 part time), a part time administrator and a part-time bookkeeper. In addition, PDP employs a part-time worker for the North East Edinburgh Older Men's Health and Well-being Project, a part-time worker for NEECAG Older People's forums and provides office accommodation for North East Edinburgh Ageing Well Project part-time support assistant. The overall aim of the Pilmey Development Project is to support local residents and groups and to encourage appropriate self-help initiatives towards the identification and resolution of their problems. PDP works with local people to identify and deliver actions which contribute to sustainable development of both individual and local groups to improve their quality of life.

PDP received a small grant from NHS Lothian Community Health Development Fund which aims to improve health and reduce health inequalities¹. This initiative aimed to tackle inequalities by working with communities which experience poor health or difficulty in accessing health services and/or social services. The term "inequalities in health" means the differences in how people experience health between different groups. Some groups experience poorer health than the majority of the population and this is what PDP hoped to address.

This report highlights experiences of health and services of women in Leith, and the inequalities they experience. It is hoped that the findings can be used to develop ways to reduce health inequalities in the area.

Background

The research follows preliminary work undertaken by Pilmey Development Project, which identified that key health issues for local women are 'stress, depression, and isolation, and associated health risks'. Local women wanted a way of meeting with other women to share health issues and concerns and to enable them to feel less isolated and alone. This has perhaps worsened in recent months, with the introduction of large scale tram works in the area. As highlighted in the research, these works have affected public transport and local businesses, and have led to greater feelings of anxiety and isolation for women in the area.

Leith is an area in particular need of attention in terms of women's health and wellbeing. There are over 19,852 women (aged 16 – 85+) in Leith & Leith Walk wards of whom 9615 are 25 - 44 years (7.4% higher than Edinburgh average in one ward). Many of the local women identified in preliminary research were over sixty and of those under 60, most have had to give up work due to chronic ill health, or to fulfil caring responsibilities, or a mixture of both. Leith and Leith Walk ward figures (2 based on 2001 census) , indicate 12,434 women (aged 16 -74) are economically inactive and 925 women are permanently sick/disabled.

A large proportion of the available housing in this part of Leith comprises of 1 bedroom tenement flats, often in poor repair. Figures for Leith and Leith Walk wards indicate 5795 households without central heating and 118 without a bath or shower. A lot of people are living alone in Leith and Leith Walk wards - over 12,903 people live alone, of which 8681 are lone pensioners - which is 6.9% higher than the Edinburgh average in one of the wards.

¹ <http://www.greenerleith.org/storage/Guidance%20notes%20Community%20Health%20Grant.pdf>

² Source: CEC area ward profiles Wards 12 & 13 (2006)

CEC Statistical overview (using SIMD 2006 figures) notes *'The Leith ward and Leith Walk ward has health risks slightly higher than the average for Scotland – that there is a higher level of risk associated with poor health (e.g. admission rates for alcohol, drug taking, prescriptions for anxiety, depression or psychosis)'*

There was a need to identify the key issues that are affecting women's health and wellbeing in the area, and take positive steps to improve the situation of local women. This research highlights these issues and develops ways of encouraging women to *help themselves* to improve their experiences of health and wellbeing.

Aims and Objectives

At the beginning of the research, two main aims were developed:

- To develop the opportunity for local women in Leith, who currently experience health inequalities, to explore their specific health concerns and develop a positive 'self help' initiative around health and wellbeing issues, in part by enhancing and enlarging the women's group in development at Pilmeny Development Project.
- To improve the awareness of key service providers (including the new health/community planning structures), of women's health and wellbeing issues, and unmet needs in Leith.

This was to be achieved by:

- Developing local outreach/survey work with local women to engage with other local women and to identify their health concerns and gaps in service provision
- Development of a local 'self help' health & wellbeing women's group which would provide the opportunity for discussion, activity sessions and to explore ways their health needs could be highlighted / met within new local health and community planning structures in Leith.
- Support/training to develop women's skills and confidence (e.g. survey work, public speaking, assertiveness, fundraising, report writing etc) to enable group to continue on a 'self help' basis
- Engaging local women in new health service and community planning structures in Leith (e.g. North Edinburgh Community Health Partnership (CHP) Patient Participation Forum (PPF) and Leith Neighbourhood Community Planning Partnership.)

These objectives were first attended to in the creation of the questionnaire used in our research to determine women's health and wellbeing concerns in Leith.

Methodology

In accordance with PDP's encouragement of self-help approaches to health and wellbeing, local women have been involved from the outset of this project both in the preliminary needs assessment stage, and with the development of the application for the CHD grant. Local women were also encouraged to play a major part in the research that took place.

A questionnaire was prepared by members of the Pilmeny Women's Health and Wellbeing group being developed in Leith. This included the development of a draft questionnaire, and a 'pilot' study with local women to re-word and shorten questions so that they were accessible to as many women as possible. Copies of the final questionnaire were made (see Appendix 1), and either filled in by members, passed around friends and neighbours who are not members, or filled in by women with the help of members of the group. Over 37 local women took part in this stage of the work. This in itself encouraged meeting other members of the community, and provided a chance to improve confidence, speaking and literacy skills. An effort was made to include BME women in the group of women questioned, and women from Polish, South Asian, Italian and Chinese communities were questioned during the research. In order to maximise the number of participants, an incentive was offered in the form of a prize draw; completed surveys were entered into a prize draw.

The questions asked focused on local women's concerns about their health and well being, with an emphasis on how these are specific to the local area. The research aimed to find out whether women feel positive about their health and wellbeing, and if they had any concerns, what these specifically were.

We also wanted to find out whether women were aware of the resources available to them as a resident of Leith, particularly if they knew of any women's groups in the area. Most of the respondents were unaware of activities and groups available to them, although many thought that a women's group would be beneficial to the area. The women questioned had many ideas about things they would like to do if a women's group was available to them, and this research was used to make recommendations for the future of the women's group being developed at PDP.

Members of the group worked together to collate the findings and identify the key issues highlighted in the questionnaires. The research process, then, involved many local women in the drafting, completion and analysis of the questionnaires, in accordance with the 'self-help' approach to health and wellbeing issues advocated by Pilmeny Development Project.

Research

Analysis of Questionnaires

The completed questionnaires were analysed by question to identify the main health issues and concerns of women in Leith.

1. What are the issues that concern you as a woman in this local community?

35 of the 37 women questioned had specific concerns about their local area. 25 of these women cited issues related to **personal safety** as a concern, articulated in their comments about street lighting, groups of youths on the streets, and drinking and drug taking. One woman, with a 15 month old child, said that safety is an issue for her, and that there should be “*resources for young people from 8 years up as they hang about*”. A concern with groups of people ‘hanging about’ on the streets of Leith was articulated by 9 women in total, across all ages. Some of the younger women questioned said:

“[it’s] *scary when you see all the folk drunk/on drugs and in groups, trying to chat you up*” (aged17)
“[there’s] *too much trouble on street, feels annoying, sometimes scary*” (aged16-24)

One young BME woman explained that the youths who hang around her flat “boozing” once threw a plant pot at her, and that she feels unsafe being alone in her ground floor flat. She said she is ‘*afraid to confront them*’ and ‘*feels threatened when passing them*’. One other woman also said that “*feeling unsafe in our own homes*” was a concern for her.

Montgomery Street was another area of Leith mentioned in the questionnaires, One woman said that “*the young kids...around the streets are intimidating. They set fire to all the bins around Montgomery Street...Kids hang out by the Calton Centre (recently closed down) and they set fire to something*”.

Some women felt ‘*groups of people on the streets*’ have perhaps contributed to **concerns about crime and burglary** in the area, and one respondent's concern that ‘*there are no policemen on the beat*’. It has also contributed to one woman’s call for ‘*security doors to be installed in flats*’. Further, groups on the streets have contributed to women feeling ‘*unsafe walking in the area in the evening and at night*’, a concern explicitly voiced by 8 of the women questioned. There was even fear to be alone in the area during the day: one woman specifically said “*I don’t like walking along by the park*”. Street lighting contributed to these concerns about public safety. 5 women listed poor street lighting as a health issue or concern, 3 of these women were from the EH6 area, and 2 from the EH7 area of Leith.

Poor street lighting was not the only area where service providers are failing local women. Rubbish and dog dirt on the pavements were listed as a concern by nearly one third of the women questioned. 3 of the women concerned about this were from the EH7 5 area of Leith, 2 from the EH6.8 area, 2 from the EH7.4 area, and one each from the EH6.4, EH6.5 and EH7.6 areas. LS in particular called for “*dog poo free areas to take children to play in*”. The deterioration of Leith was further articulated by women in their concerns about uneven pavements, and the road works currently taking place in the area. These road works have had a negative effect on local public transport, decreasing the amount of buses going to the area and changing routes. This was listed by 3 of the women as a health concern; these were older respondents and those with a disability. One woman explained that uneven pavements and bad lighting have produced a “*feeling of anxiety that the area is deteriorating quickly*”.

Another issue highlighted in the answers given by the women was social isolation. One young Polish woman, explained that she *“do[es] not know many people in the area”* when asked about health concerns, and another listed *‘loneliness’* as a concern for her. Perhaps this is related to the anti social behaviour of tenants in the area, one woman was concerned about the *“amount of flats in the community which are rented to noisy tenants”*, and that her complaints about this are disregarded. Another woman said that her *“neighbours keep changing a lot. Sometimes it’s good because they cause trouble, but it’s not like the olden days when your neighbours helped you more. I feel a bit cut off, but it’s better than getting hassle”*.

3 women expressed anxiety about money and finance when asked about their health concerns. One 17 year old woman explained that *“it’s hard to get a job round here, I’m on a course through the Port of Leith, a “Get Ready for Work” course. When I leave this job I’ll be back to square one. If you’ve got shit exam results it’s hard”*. Another respondent called for cheap shopping as *‘prices have gone up’*.

2. Are you aware of any women’s groups in your area? If yes can you tell us what they are?

22 of the women questioned during the research could not name a single women’s group in their local area. Of the 15 that did know of women’s groups, five knew of Pilmeny Development Project, 3 of the younger respondents names Citadel girls group, one woman named St Mary’s Guild Post Office Club, St Ninian’s Guild and the swimming baths, two mentioned Milan South Asian women’s group. Link-Up, Women’s Support Centre Lochend, Ladyfest and Women onto Work were also mentioned. One woman was a member of Parent and Baby group at PYC.

3. Do you think there is a need for activities and classes in Leith for women?

All but two of the respondents answered yes to this question. One said that it would be good because some women prefer women only activities, one young Indian woman said she would like a multicultural group, one called for *“a yoga class to meet other people from this area”*, and another woman called for *“more confidence building, money management and support groups”*. One woman indicated that she did not think there is a need for activities and classes in Leith for women, and another woman said she was unsure: she said she is *“happy to go to mixed classes, but for others they maybe can’t go to mixed classes”*.

4. Do you have any specific health issues/concerns?

17 of the women questioned indicated that they specific health issues or concerns. Their health issues included arthritis; diabetes, asthma and smoking. Four of the women questioned suffered from, or were recovering from mental health issues, with three of these suffering from depression. One suggested *‘a support group could be run from local GPs surgeries, or advice given on where to find counselling services and that alternative therapies and relaxation techniques could be offered at a women’s group’*. Four of the women questioned suffered from arthritis and felt *‘sufferers should be provided with more information about this affliction, and given leaflets at GPs surgeries’*. Again, suggestions were made that alternative therapies and pain relieving techniques could be discussed at a women’s group. Three of the women questioned listed asthma a health issue and that *‘local service providers could look to reduce the amount of pollution from traffic in the area and sufferers should be given advice to help them give up smoking, if this is an issue for them’* Three women questioned were suffering from diabetes they felt *‘specific information should be offered to sufferers, at local surgeries, including tips on healthy eating and exercise.’* High blood pressure, eczema, sight problems, sore joints, fatigue and bone aches were also mentioned – the woman who mentioned the latter said that she would like advice on this. Mental health issues were mentioned

four times, with one of the women suffering from depression, and one woman recovering from this. Mobility problems were listed by two women, one of whom needed a walking stick, and one of whom explained that she was on crutches and that *“all the uneven footpaths and tram works make it hard to get around. Roads blocked off make it hard to drive home”*. Health concerns of women in Leith included *‘maintaining good levels of health’, the ‘increase in traffic fume’s, and the ‘lack of transport and parking at the Western General Hospital.’*

5 and 6. What do you think are important health and wellbeing issues concerning local women? Why do you think this is?

31 of the women questioned responded to this question, giving a wide range of answers. One woman was concerned that there was nothing for women only, for example women only screening, when asked why she thought that it is because **“we [women] are not priority”**. Four of the women said that provision of information was an important health and wellbeing issue. Prevention information, such as screening, needs improvement said one woman, she explained that *“waiting lists are too long, Doctor’s lists too long for appointments, need more continuity of care”*. One woman also expressed concern at the *“lack of information about what’s going on, and available to women”*, and another said that it is caused by *“lack of publicity”*. One respondent asked *“if you moved here, how do you find out about local resources?...My health visitor at the GPs have information...it’s scattered information, we need a leaflet to pick up with all the information in one place”*.

This lack of information available to women could contribute to their feelings of loneliness, also articulated in response to this question. One respondent explained that *“there’s nowhere to go to get out of the house, I can’t afford to go to those wee cafés. There’s nowhere to find out what’s on except [one] place – it’s got posters in the windows but I’d be nervous to go to anything”*. One woman said that *‘companionship and laughter’* are important to health and wellbeing as *“people can feel isolated when retired, and have poor health”*. Another woman explained that meeting people and making friends is important, as *“if you are on your own it is a very lonely life”*. A women’s group was seen as beneficial by one young polish woman, who said that it can help *“new arrivals in the area to interact with women and the community”*. She said that this is important as women can share their experiences with her. Another woman said that isolation was an important health and wellbeing issue for local women, and put this down to the diversity of the community: *“age, culture, and people moving on – it may be difficult to build relationships with neighbours”*. A young Indian woman said that *“people don’t understand the cultures, which sets a divide”*.

Isolation was linked to mental health issues by one woman, who said that there are *“a lot of mental health issues and general health issues...there’s a lot of isolation a lot of us live on our own”*. Mental and emotional wellbeing were also seen as important by two other women, one of whom explained that many women do not have *“money and places to go to learn these things...the way many are brought up within families with mental health, alcohol and drug problems. It is a vicious circle for many as not enough is offered to show there is a way out of this cycle.”*

Personal safety was another area seen as an important health and wellbeing issue for local women, and was listed as such by six women. One young woman said that personal safety is an issue for her and her friends, and also said that there is a lack of things to do when you’re young: *“when folk get excited they get thrown out of the youth club...maybe staff, they feel threatened”*. One woman said that is important to feel safe, so that *“I don’t worry and get stressed”*. A respondent noted that *“you need to be aware of your surroundings. If I park in Balfour Street I don’t like it as it is badly lit”*. Another woman said that she is *“frightened of being out in the streets due to folk with alcohol/drugs being around – [it’s] intimidating”*. One woman said that the increase in groups of men drinking on the street could be due to *“new cultures and people moving to Leith”*. Personal safety also links to

another health and wellbeing issue seen as important by those questioned – keeping fit and exercising. Three women said that this was an important health and wellbeing issue, however one woman said that she would like space for safe exercising: *“feeling safe to go out for a run”*. Keeping healthy in terms of diet was also mentioned by one woman; however she felt that her financial situation prevented this. She explained that *“as prices go up, you make sure kids are getting fed first, and you forgo your own nutrition”*.

Another health and wellbeing issue that was important to local women was the condition of their local area. One woman explained that *“all the shop fronts are scruffy, the area seems to be more unsafe, causing women especially to feel unsafe”*. She explained that this might be because *“By-laws are not being adhered to. The council should be more proactive, Leith Walk looks like a slum”*. Another woman said that *“the area looks unkempt and untidy”*.

Other important health and wellbeing issues for the women questioned were domestic violence, mentioned by two women, and drug and alcohol addiction. One respondent said that these things can be caused by *“unemployment, lack of opportunity, boredom, lack of support and activities”*. Two of the women also listed pregnancy as an important wellbeing issue for women – one in the context of teenage pregnancy, attributing it to *“girls/boys not thinking about safety when having sex”*, and another saying that *“when pregnant you need to keep healthy for the baby”*. This woman also listed cervical cancer as an important health and wellbeing issue, as it is *“serious and widespread”*.

7. What do you think causes some of the health and wellbeing problems that concern local women?

34 of the respondents felt they had an answer to this question. Of these women, 9 said that being alone or isolation was the cause of health and wellbeing problems. One woman said that there is *“nobody to turn to. Nobody really listens any more”*. Women noted that they did not know their neighbours, which can be a problem especially for older or disabled women, as they may need support from those living near by and one suggested *‘local authorities should introduce an initiative encouraging people to get to know their neighbours.’* Another woman explained that there is a *“distrust of people, folk used to be more friendly. I don't know all my neighbours. The flat next door is like a hotel...Where we come from, you speak to people in the street, but here folk are suspicious”*. One woman said that having no close family can cause health and wellbeing issues. Other women said that stress or depression can be a result of the *“loss of a close relative or husband”*, or that health and wellbeing can be affected after marital breakdown. One respondent explained that she felt cut off: *“if you don't have kids or a job you don't meet people easily”*, and one said that she does not know many people in her area *“I work long hours...I don't cross over with people (so I don't know many neighbours)”*.

Money and finance was another factor perceived by women to affect health and wellbeing. 10 of the women mentioned unemployment or lack of money as affecting their health and wellbeing, one woman said that high *“food prices and low incomes”* affected her. One young woman told of the problems she has had getting a job in the area, explaining that there is a *“lack of jobs for young Leithers. I think people think young people will be little shits, just cause we're from round here. I think I got treated differently cause of my brothers and folk I hang around with. They think you must be the same as them”*. Two women mentioned finance in relation to being able to do activities: as one woman explained, *“[there is a] lack of choices for free things to do”*. One other woman felt restricted, attributing health and wellbeing issues to *“Lack of cash. Lack of choice. Lack of Space”*. As one other woman explained, a lack of finance can lead to more problems for women, she explained that *“No money [and] rising prices causes stress and worry”*, and another described other ways that a low income can restrict women: *“Having no money...so can't get a job to better*

themselves [they have] poor housing".

The appearance and nature of the Leith area was seen as another health and wellbeing issue by the women questioned. One woman said that the deterioration of the area has an affect on health and wellbeing: *"the litter in the streets and poor facilities can lead to stress and anxiety"*. This was echoed by another woman who explained that it is *"stressful to see the state of [the] streets. Drug addicts and drunks at all times of the day and night"*. These groups of people are seen by women to cause trouble, as one explained: *"alcohol/drug abuse causes violence in Leith Walk"*. These things have perhaps contributed to local women's feelings of being unsafe: one respondent said *"At night it doesn't feel safe to go around. There's not enough to do near here, I don't want to go on the bus to get to something"*.

A final contributor to women's health and wellbeing, listed by the women questioned, was the lack of information and education for women in Leith. One young Indian woman explained that *"they [women] do not have the education about how to keep themselves healthy"*. This was also mentioned in relation to sexual health by two of the younger women questioned, one said that *"having under-age sex"* can cause health and wellbeing issues, and another said that there is *"not enough education about pregnancy and cervical cancer"*. Healthy eating was another issue picked up by one Polish woman, who explained that *"eating habits are very bad in this country...too much take aways. Try to teach women about healthy eating"*. Another woman said that women *"don't know where to get information"*, and that this can be a problem when it comes to health issues: *"Dr surgery times do not suit everyone; women keep things to themselves"*. A lack of support in education was also seen as an issue by one other woman.

8. What might be the benefits of women's only group?

Most of the women questioned thought that a women's group would provide a more comfortable environment to talk about women's issues. 24 of the women questioned shared the view that women could talk more openly and freely in a women's only group. As one respondent explained *"women might find it [a] more comfy environment to chat about certain things. Women from different ethnic backgrounds [can] feel comfy"*. One of the younger women questioned said that *"people [women] maybe feel like they cannae say much in front of guys. You can talk about more things if it's just lasses, like periods, sex life"*. One of the younger women questioned said that women *"don't need to worry about men staring and judging"* in a women's only group. Six of the women mentioned that in a women's group, they could talk about issues specific to women: ***"I don't want to talk about football, pigeons or the races"***, as another explained, you would be *"able to discuss women's issues openly, they are...different to what concerns men"*. One woman said that she would feel safer to express her views in a female only environment, as she has *"experienced what happens when even just a couple of men dominate"*. In a women only environment, one woman said she would feel less inhibited, and that there would be *"empathy with other women"*.

Some of the women saw the benefit of sharing problems in a women's group: *"[women] can discuss things, meet folk and share problems"*. Some women said that it would be good to learn from other women's experiences, and to get advice and help each other. One respondent said: *"Women can talk openly about their worries and build strategies to deal with what they worry about"* and others said that a women's group would be useful to provide support and advice, and allow *"identification and use of resources available to women"*.

4 of the women questioned mentioned the possibility of forming friendships at a women's group, with one saying it could provide *"a chance to...perhaps develop relationships"*. Another woman also said something similar, she said a women's group would be a *"good chance to meet and chat with"*

other women, good to build friendships”, and provide “*companionship*”. This was especially important to those feeling isolated or those new to the area. One Polish woman said that it would provide a “*possibility to talk to women...and share their experiences with me*”.

9. What would you like to think about and do if there were health and wellbeing sessions for women in the community?

Despite the wide variety of respondents, women had quite similar ideas for what they would like to do in a women's group. 8 of the women said that they would like to talk to other women, share problems, and get advice from one another. As one woman explained, “*I have various concerns. I think having a women's group to go to and discuss these would be great*”. For one woman this included the sharing of information about how to deal with rising food costs, calling for ‘*market price fruit and veg*’, and “*cookery classes, not basic i.e. Indian, Chinese and cheaply done*”. Another young woman also asked for cookery classes, and two asked for tips on healthy eating. One respondent called for a “*drop in health centre where you can go about wee worries i.e. not your doctor, and informal thing [to get] information about sore knees, and making your own herbal remedies*”. One woman called for visits from “*community and health professionals [to] speak about these issues*”. Other activities listed by the women included exercise, singing and outings. Six women called for complementary therapies, with some listing relaxation techniques, herbal remedies, tai chi, meditation, massage, reflexology and aromatherapy as things they would like to learn about at a women's group. It seems that some of the respondents, as one woman explained, wanted “*pampering... [the] feel good factor. TIME OUT*”. Other activities were singing, which was asked for by two women, including “*sing-along ABBA...music, DVDs*”. Three other women asked for Bingo sessions, as it “*gets people together and helps me to use my brain*”, and two asked for outings and group activities. Exercise and fitness were also important for three women, who would like to do exercise such as dancing, yoga, swimming, and be able to use gym facilities. As well as general health and wellbeing activities, women were interested in self-improvement, with three women calling for this type of activity. One young Polish woman wanted classes on time management, one wanted to be helped with assertiveness, and one woman listed “*confidence building, money management, support groups and counselling services*’ as things she would like from a women's group. One young woman said that personal safety is something that she would like to focus on in a women's group.

10. What time suits you best for sessions, classes etc?

For some of the women, there was more than one time suitable for them to come to a women's group. In total, 9 women indicated that they could attend a women's group in the morning, 21 women said that they could attend a group in the afternoon, and 17 indicated that they could attend an evening group. One woman said that she could only attend evening sessions, unless the group was a mother and baby group.

11. Would you need some extra support to be able to participate?

5 of the women questioned indicated that they would need some extra support to be able to attend a women's group. Three of the women asked for a crèche, with one requesting a crèche “*where he [son] was well cared for and I was near by*”. One woman would need occasional baby-sitting, and another requested a youth club for children too old for a crèche. Two women indicated that they would not need support to participate in a women's group, but asked that transport be provided for people with a disability or mobility problems.

12. Would you be interested in taking part/being kept informed of any women's sessions being held locally?

Of the 37 women questioned, all but 6 of the women indicated that they would like to be kept informed of any future women's sessions, 4 answered no, and two were unsure. One young woman asked for a group for younger women, and a group where younger and older women mix.

Any other comments?

14 of the women offered comments at the end of the questionnaire.

2 women commented on the current road works taking place in Leith, saying that “[I] *will be glad to see tram works finished; the whole experience has been very stressful to older people*”. Another woman said that “*the road works are stopping people from doing things*”. This issue was also commented on by another woman, who said that the “*bus routes and timing were good but since the tram works began – it's horrendous*”. One other respondent called for more police on the beat, and commented that she “*never sees anyone cleaning the streets these days*”. The state of Leith at the moment led one woman to say “*I used to be proud to say I lived in Leith, not now. I feel I apologise for the area now*”. Women also commented on the area saying that food bills are going up, and that her and her young son are eating less...“*when finances are tighter, I'll still get fruit but I keep it for him, the bairn*”. Another woman expressed her concerns about personal safety. She says “*really, the safety at 1 or 2 in the morning, you get paranoid...if it's dark and we think they look dodgy we avoid them*”. Another woman asked where the groups that used to be held at the Calton centre had moved to.

Other comments were to do with the future of a women's group – two women commented on what would be a fair price to pay per session, with one saying £2 and the other £3. One woman called for outdoor activities in a women's group, and another said that “*it's very important to make classes accessible to as many as possible, possibly offering childcare and even incentives to motivate people. Also advertising as wide as possible*”. Two women wished ‘*Pilmey Development Project good luck with a Women's group*’, and one said that in future, questionnaires must be clear about what 'wellbeing' is.

Key Issues Concerns

The questionnaires uncovered 4 main issues of concern for local women – **social isolation, environment, money and personal safety** (see Appendix 2, fig. 1). These concerns were shared by women of all ages, and across all areas of Leith (see Appendix 2, fig. 2&3). Despite being designed to focus on health issues (although the questions were framed in this way), women used the questionnaires to voice concerns about their local area, including environmental concerns and unemployment. The concerns sometimes were not directly problems with their ‘health’ in terms of illness or medical problems, but local women saw ‘health’ to include anxiety about the state of Leith, feeling unsafe at night, lack of money and feeling isolated. These concerns overlapped across ages and ethnicities.

Personal Safety

A concern with personal safety was shown to have a huge effect on women's health and well being. It effects their confidence to take part in activities outside of the home, leading to a feeling of isolation and loneliness, and even can effect their fitness levels, as one young woman explained that she needed a safe place for exercise and to “*feel safe to go out for a run*”. Many women also explained that this feeling of anxiety was perpetuated by the deterioration of their local area – scruffy shop fronts and dog dirt, poor street lighting, intimidating groups of people outside pubs or on the streets, all left local women in Leith with a feeling of unease, contributing to feelings of being unsafe.

Social Isolation

Feelings of isolation expressed by many women were heightened by the fact that many did not know their neighbours. One woman described the flat next to her as being like a 'hotel' as the 'tenants change often', perhaps due to the high student population in the area. Another interviewee attributed this to the fact that the community is very diverse – 'different ages and cultures means that it can be difficult to form relationships with neighbours'. Only 14 of the women questioned were able to name any women's groups in the area. Among those named were the women's sessions being developed at PDP (mentioned by 5 of the women), Milan (SWO) and Link-up Women's Support Project. This demonstrates that information about local resources is not reaching local women in Leith. Respondents cited lack and cost of activities and entertainment as a factor contributing to their feelings of isolation. Women did not know how to find out about local resources, and asked for leaflets or other information. Older women questioned informed us that lack of adequate transport made it difficult to get to these activities anyway, and that they felt unsafe to travel to activities if they are held in the evening. Others said that some activities, even going to a café, are too expensive or that they feel too nervous to go – indicating a lack of confidence in some of the women interviewed.

This feeling of loneliness and isolation is a major concern when we consider that 19 out of the 37 women interviewed had specific health issues including mobility problems, diabetes and mental health issues, or causes of stress such as marital breakdown or bereavement. The women we interviewed were lucky in that most felt they could call on someone if they had a problem, however this is not true for many women living in Leith. The deterioration of the area, highlighted in the questionnaires, and exemplified by uneven footpaths and inadequate public transport, even to get to the hospital means that many women's mobility problems are worsened. This can lead to severe isolation if these women do not have friends and family to call on.

Environment

One woman questioned said that 'the deterioration of shop fronts and the amount of rubbish on the streets' left women with a feeling of unease and anxiety – and increased their feelings of being unsafe. The state of the area was upsetting to some women, (see appendix 2, fig. 2) who felt ashamed to live in the area, as one woman explained:

"I used to be proud to say I live in Leith...not now...I feel I apologise for the area"

Money/Finance

Women said that loneliness is an important health and wellbeing issue, and for many this comes as a result of low incomes which mean they cannot often attend activities or even go out to cafes and felt 'more free events and activities should be made available to women in Leith, this could be achieved by way of a women's group'. Another concern highlighted by women in their questionnaires was with the 'high costs of healthy eating and exercise'. As for nutrition, some women cited lack of education as preventing healthy eating in the area. However, some felt that since prices have gone up in supermarkets, healthy eating has become difficult. One young woman said that she found she was forgoing her own nutrition in order to feed her children. A lack of money was mentioned by some of the women questioned as a health concern, particularly by young women who are unemployed. One young woman explained that she had poor exam grades, and was worried about finding a job. As mentioned earlier, for many women a lack of funds can make it difficult for women to go to activities to "learn new things" and to meet people.

Need for a women's group

The questionnaires highlighted local women's need for their own group. All but one of the women questioned thought that a women's group was needed in Leith, and 31 women wanted to be kept informed of women's sessions being held locally. This strongly suggests that women in Leith feel they would benefit from the group being developed by Pilmeny Development Project. Further, a women's only group is especially necessary in the case of some BME women.

Many women are unaware of what resources are available to women in Leith, and thought a women's group would allow for the voicing of their worries, and sharing of information, such as health advice, in a comfortable environment: one younger woman expressed a concern that you "*cannae say much in front of guys*". The idea that women will be able to discuss things more openly, freely, and in a more comfortable environment among other women, was voiced by most women questioned. They felt that they could talk about shared experiences to gain advice, and not worry about men "*staring and judging*", a concern voiced particularly by the younger women questioned.

Women felt a women's group could provide advice on saving money and avoiding debt, and also ideas for low cost meals and grocery shopping.

A women's group would be an ideal arena for women to share information about activities in the area, and also to share experiences and advice. One woman questioned said that a group for women would be beneficial as they can "*learn from experience and support each other*", and also provide "*support and confidence*". The notion that women can share their personal experiences of health issues was voiced by many of the women. This could perhaps build confidence, or result in someone accompanying women to visit their GP, if they are nervous about going by themselves.

Women also hoped that they would form friendships and gain female company at a women's group. Feelings of loneliness was not just felt by older women with few family members, but also younger females who were new to the area – one young Polish woman wanted '*somewhere to meet other women and share experiences*'. These friendships are invaluable to women in the area, as many felt alone or isolated from others.

What would women like to do in a women's group?

The women questioned saw a women's group as a forum to voice their concerns about the community and environment. '*This could take the form of letter writing (an effective way to improve literacy skills), or visits from local council or health officials*'. The women questioned are worried and anxious about the state of Leith, particularly about the lack of street cleaners and amount of rubbish and dog dirt on the streets, but also because they feel the area lacks a sense of community. They felt that '*by taking part in a women's group, women can be given a chance to actively change their situations by making their concerns heard by the council and other local service providers*'. A women's group could encourage women to take part in local meetings such as Patient Participation Forums (PPF) or local community groups like the Leith Neighbourhood Community Planning Partnership. These kinds of activities could provide local women with a sense of community, achievement and confidence.

As well as taking active steps to improve their local environment, women had many other ideas for things they would like to do in a women's group.

A concern with healthy eating led women to call for cookery classes or exciting recipe ideas, which made use of low-cost ingredients. A women's group could also provide the chance to share

information about where to find the best value ingredients, and which fruit and vegetables are in season.

As we have seen, money and unemployment was also a concern for the women questioned. In 2005, 15.9% of the working age population were employment deprived in the multi-member ward of Leith, much higher than the 9.6% figure across the city of Edinburgh². A women's group could provide support here too: helping young women, who voiced concern about unemployment in their questionnaires, to help themselves in finding a job. A women's group could offer motivation and support from other women, proof-reading of CVs amongst the group, and visits from local careers advisors.

Local women also called for fitness activities, such as walking, yoga and dancing; the group could provide the opportunity for women to exercise safely, as some women feel unsafe to walk or run in the area alone. Relaxation techniques were also frequently mentioned in the questionnaires, including meditation, aromatherapy and reflexology. A women's group providing these activities would not only make women feel more fit and healthy, but also provide ways to combat the stress and anxiety felt by the women we questioned in Leith.

Personal health issues were also something women wanted to address in a women's group such as the one proposed by PDP. Some were unhappy with their local health services, as they were unaware of the resources available to them, such as screening initiatives. A women's group could provide a forum to share information about what is on offer. One woman called for the group to include a drop-in health centre to talk about worries: "*an informal thing instead of [going to] the Doctor*", which for some women, can seem daunting or unnecessary. Some also called for alternative medicines, such as herbal remedies, and complementary therapies. It was also mentioned that a women's group could provide support for women in need, such as elderly women – one woman said a group could act to ensure "*older people with health problems get the help they require*", and another said women could help each other with '*care of children and the elderly*'.

Women's concerns about their personal safety could also be addressed by a women's group. As well as providing basic self-defence classes, called for by one interviewee, women could take part in lobbying for better street lighting and more police presence. This would see women taking active steps to improve their own situations and confidence levels.

From the suggestions and attitudes seen in their completed questionnaires, it is clear that local women are enthusiastic about the creation of a women's group and the access PDP has to a nearby centre at No 15 Buchanan Street, in which to hold sessions.

It is important that the creation of a women's group listens to the suggestions of women, especially the need to publicise group meetings and outside activities. Perhaps a mailing list could be developed, and leaflets and schedules sent out, in order to motivate women to attend the sessions. This could be aided with a small contribution from women who attend – a few of the women said they would be willing to pay £2 or £3 to attend sessions.

² Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics comparison of Leith (Multi-member ward) and City of Edinburgh (Local Authority): <http://www.sns.gov.uk/Reports/Report.aspx?ReportId=3&AreaTypeId=MW&AreaId=289&AreaTypeIdSecond=LA&AreaIdSecond=230>

Conclusions

The research has found that participation in a local women's group would be a positive way for women to improve their own health and wellbeing.

The research has uncovered the issues of concern for local women, which can be grouped into four categories **personal safety**, which includes concerns about street lighting, **money**, which includes worries about unemployment and rising prices in supermarkets, the local **environment**, which includes concern about rubbish and dog dirt on the streets, and the deterioration of shop fronts and public transport, and **isolation**, which is felt by women of all ages. This information can be shared with the council and other local authorities such as the police and health services, to encourage them to improve the provision of services to the Leith area. Rubbish on the streets and bad street lighting, amongst other concerns; have been shown to have deep rooted affects on the lives of local women.

The research has also provided Pilmeny Development Project with ideas of how to expand and improve the women's group already in development, in order to provide women with ways to deal with the concerns uncovered in the questionnaires.

The research has provided ideas for activities which a women's group can provide to address the concerns of local women. The questionnaires have also supplied a large number of names of women who would be interested in attending a women's group.

The responses from women have shown that women *want* to be involved in the community, and *want* to improve their situations, but are unsure of what is available to them, or do not have the confidence or money to utilise these services. It seems that a women's group would be an effective way to remedy these issues.

Recommendations

Following analysis of the answers given by women in their questionnaires, a number of recommendations have been made:

1. Personal safety:

- Local service providers should act to improve street lighting.
- There should be an increase in the numbers of police officers on the beat
- Activities should be provided for young people, to reduce the number of groups of teenagers on the streets.
- Improve public transport, increasing the number of buses going to and from the area.
- Offer self defence classes, to increase women's confidence when walking alone.
- Offer and publicise help and advice to drug and alcohol users.

2. Local environment:

- Increasing the number of litter and cigarette bins in the area.
- Increasing the number of street cleaners in the area.
- Introduce more Environmental Health Officers who can serve on the spot fines for littering.
- Improving the condition of shop fronts, for example repainting them.
- Provide more bins to dispose of dog waste.

3. Social isolation of local women:

- Start a women's group which can provide a place for local women to meet, and provide activities to get them out of their homes. Women should be provided with a place to meet other women and develop friendships, combating feelings of isolation. In turn, this support can help to prevent the stress and worry that can arise from marital breakdown or bereavement.
- Introduce a volunteer system where local residents can visit those who feel alone, especially those who experiencing bereavement.
- Put measures in place to improve contact with neighbours in the area.
- Women noted that they did not know their neighbours, which can be a problem especially for older or disabled women, as they may need support from those living near by. Perhaps local authorities should introduce an initiative encouraging people to get to know their neighbours.

4. Women's issues re education, unemployment, lack of money and finance:

- Community members could organise and publicise local co-operatives, where residents can buy local, in season produce for reasonable prices.
- Increase support for local businesses in an attempt to keep prices down.
- To try to tackle unemployment among young women, a clinic offering advice to help job hunting and advice on CV writing could be set up. Also, the resources available at the local Job Centre and Citizen's Advice Bureau should be publicised.
- Local women should be helped to find employment, and made aware of the resources available to them in this regard, such as the job centre. A women's group could be a good place to provide such information.
- Education should be made accessible to women, regarding issues such as safe sex, to help prevent teenage pregnancy, on healthy eating, in order to prevent afflictions such as obesity and diabetes, and help with drug or alcohol addiction.

5. Information needs of local women:

- Local groups should aim to publicise their activities, in local free newspapers and magazines.

6. Activities and classes for Women in Leith:

- The number of groups for women in Leith should be increased. Women only groups are necessary in the case of some BME women, and will provide a place for local women to meet and form friendships. This in turn will tackle some of the health and wellbeing issues described by local women such as loneliness.

7. Women's health concerns:

- Mental health issues and depression - Need for support group or advice on where to find counselling services.
- Alternative therapies and relaxation techniques could be offered at a women's group.
- Arthritis – need for more information; leaflets at GPs surgeries.
- Asthma – need to reduce the amount of pollution from traffic in the area, and sufferers should be given advice to help them give up smoking, if this is an issue for them.

- Diabetes - Specific information should be offered to sufferers, at local surgeries, including tips on healthy eating and exercise.
- Women should be made aware of the resources available to them, including local events and activities, and screening programs, such as cervical screening, and other health checks available to them through the NHS. This could be achieved by way of a women's group, with visits from local health professionals.

8. Development of a local women's group:

- A women's group should be provided for local women, enabling women to speak openly and freely about their concerns and health issues, without the presence of men which could cause embarrassment.
- A women's group would also provide an arena to form friendships, and support networks.
- A women's group should be set up, providing low-cost activities for local women to take part in, this will help to combat feelings of isolation.
- A women's group could provide the opportunity for women from diverse backgrounds to meet and understand each other.
- A women's group could provide support and advice, as women may share experiences or have been through similar things.
- Local service providers should listen to women's positive views on women only activities and services, and see if they can transfer this to other local initiatives.
- Local women should be consulted to decide on the best time and day to hold such a group. If held in the evening, a women's group should liaise with a local youth club, so that women are able to make arrangements for any children too old to attend a crèche.
- Information about local babysitting or crèche services should be provided for women who would like to attend a women's group.
- Those with mobility problems should be consulted, in order to decide how Pilmeny Development Project can help them to reach women's group meetings and activities.

9. Activities local women's group should undertake:

- A women's group should provide outings for women, but at low cost to local women.
- Women called for activities such as Bingo, that bring people together and also use the brain
- Women called for alternative therapies, these should be provided and women encouraged to help themselves with health issues
- Women asked to share problems, personal experiences and advice, a group should be a forum for this.
- A women's group should provide relaxation techniques, to help women suffering from stress and other mental health issues.
- A women's group should provide the space and time for women to exercise, with women calling for dance, yoga and gym facilities.
- A women's group should provide advice on healthy eating, including information about seasonal fruit and vegetables, and recipe ideas.
- Women also called for visits from local service providers and health officials, to discuss their concerns and make suggestions.

Outcomes

Outcomes achieved as a result of the research:

- Opportunities will have been provided for local women to participate in outreach survey and related women's group activities

Local women participated in the drafting, completion and analysis of questionnaires, used in the research into the health and wellbeing of women in Leith. This will have contributed to increased confidence and literacy skills amongst the women involved. In total, 37 women answered the questionnaire, and more were involved in its production. The questionnaires uncovered four main issues of concern for local women, which can be passed on to local service providers in order to improve their situations.

- Statistics and information will be available on number of local women who have participated, types of health inequalities they experience and health concerns/issues they identified.

The questionnaires completed by local women provided Pilmeny Development Project with information about the main health and wellbeing concerns of women in Leith. Some of the concerns they had were a result of inequalities specific to the Leith area of Edinburgh, such as unemployment and the 'deterioration' of the area, due, in part to large scale tram works. We also have information on the ages and postcodes of women who have articulated these concerns. The majority of women came from the EH6.8 area (eleven), with seven women each from the EH6.4 and EH7.5 areas of Leith. Four of the respondents were from the EH7.4 area, with three from the EH6.5 area, 2 from EH7.6 area, and one each from the EH5.3 and EH6.6 areas. One postcode was unknown (see figure 4).

In terms of ages of respondents, the majority of women were aged between 45-64 (eleven). Nine women were aged between 24-44, and another nine were aged between 65-84. Four were aged 16-24, and 3 were under 16. One respondent's age was unknown (see figure 5).

- A 'Self Help' group will have been established and an activity programme developed, in line with their identified needs.

Using the information provided by women in their questionnaires, Pilmeny Development Project can develop a women's group, enlisting the many women who expressed a wish to be a part of the project in their questionnaires. A programme of activities can be developed, with the aim to aid women to 'help themselves' in addressing their health and wellbeing concerns. The women questioned have put forward their own ideas for activities they would like to do, such as outings to combat feelings of isolation, or cookery classes to encourage healthy eating.

- Key service providers will be made more aware of local women's health issues/unmet needs in Leith.

The information provided by local women can be shared with local service providers, in the hope that it will encourage them to improve their services, and make local women more aware of the services on offer to them. The research has made clear that poor service provision in Leith, such as a lack of street cleaners or police officers on the beat, can have deep rooted effects on women, increasing their anxiety levels and feelings of being unsafe. This report is intended to be presented at local Public Partnership Forums, by local women who took part in the research. Local women will be consulted when planning this initiative.

The report will be made available to key service providers and local authorities, who may be able to provide funding and support for future local community projects.

APPENDIX 1

Pilmey Womens Positive Health and Wellbeing Group

**SURVEY OF WOMEN HEALTH & WELLBEING
IN LEITH/LEITH WALK WARDS**



PRIZE DRAW QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Address:Post Code

Tel No: E:mail

Age: 16 – 24 25 – 44 45 – 64 65 – 84

1. What are the issues that concern you as a woman in this local community?

2. Are you aware of any Women's Groups in your area?
If yes can you tell us what they are?

3. Do you think there is a need for activities and classes in Leith for women?
Yes No

4. Do you have any specific health issues/concerns? Yes No
If Yes please state

5. What do you think are important health wellbeing issues concerning local women?

6. Why do you think this is?

7. What do you think causes some of the health and wellbeing problems that concern local women?

8. What might be the benefits of a women's only group?

9. What would you like to think about and do if there were health and wellbeing sessions for women in the community?

10. What time suits you best for sessions/classes etc.

morning afternoon evening

11. Would you need some extra support to be able to participate (e.g. sitter service or a crèche

Yes No If yes please give details

12. Would you be interested in taking part/being kept informed of any Womens Sessions being help locally?

Yes No

13. Any other comments you wish to make?



Thanks for completing this questionnaire. Please return to:-

**PILMENY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, 19 – 21 BUCHANAN STREET,
EDINBURGH EH6 8SQ Tel:: 0131 553 2559**

E-mail pilmenyproject@btconnect.com Website: www.pilmenydevelopmentproject.co.uk

Appendix 2

Figure 1.

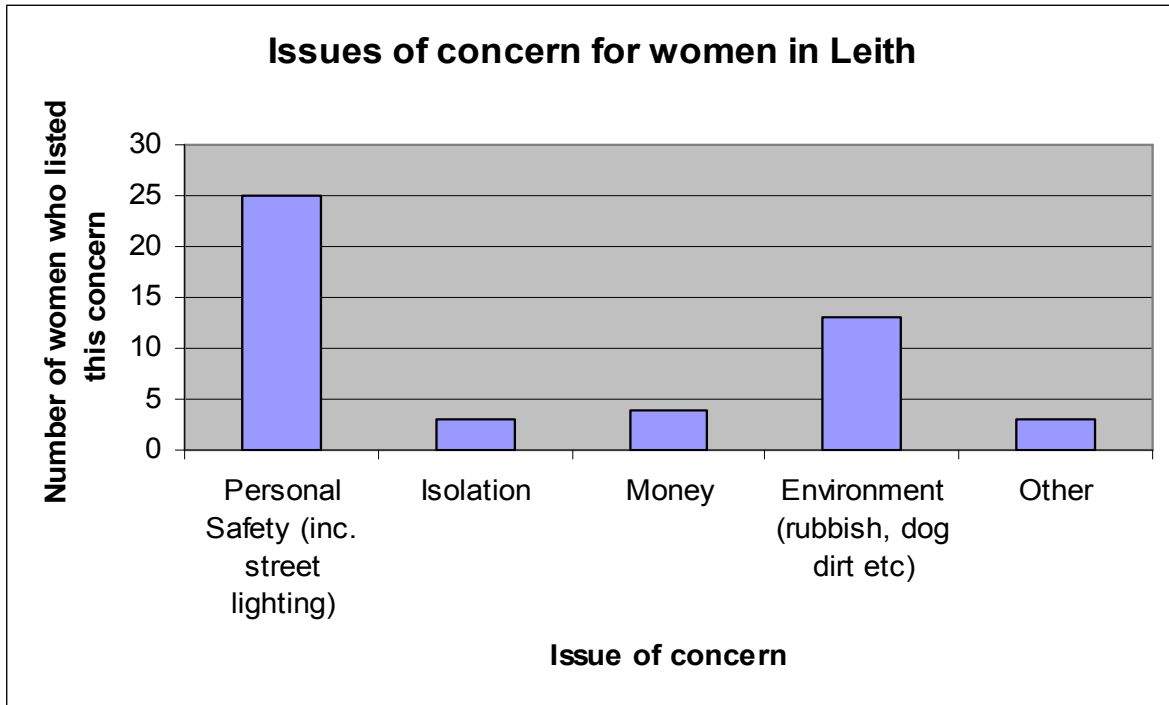


Figure 2.

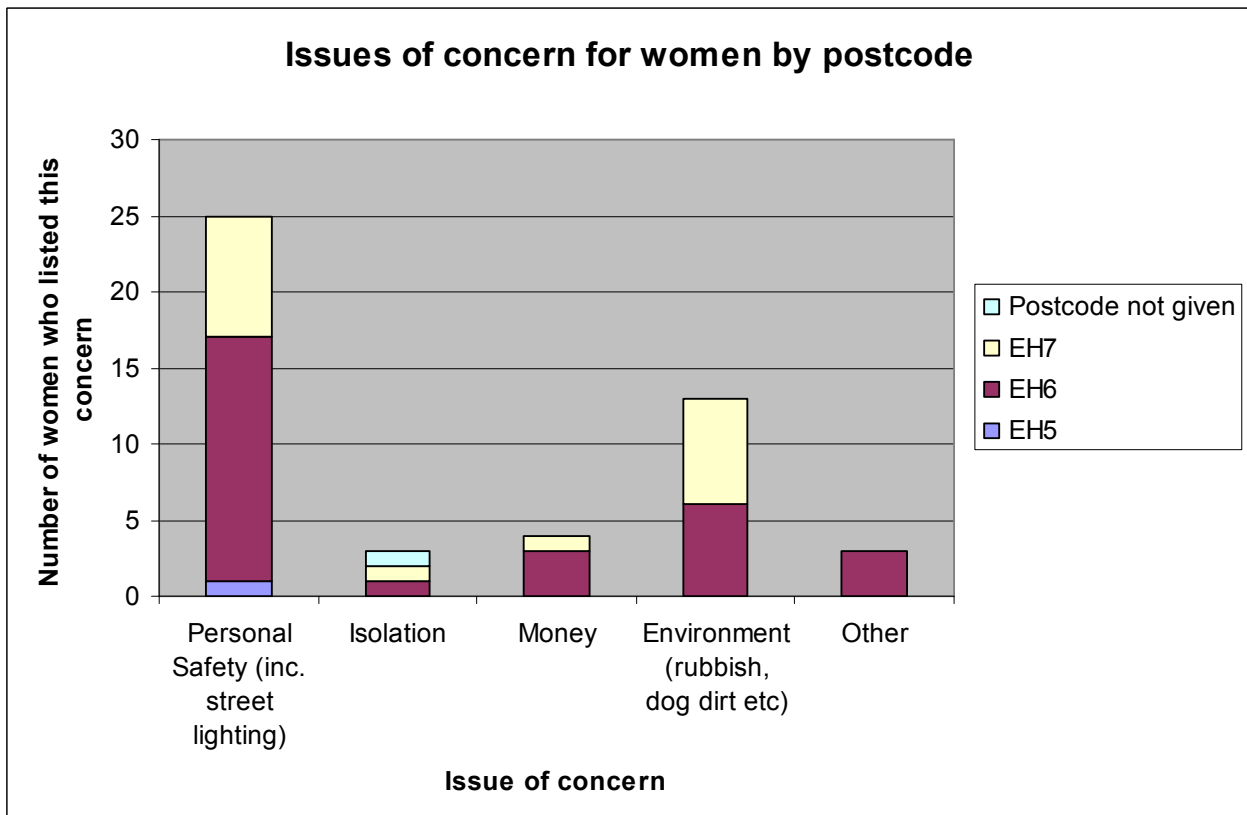


Figure 3.

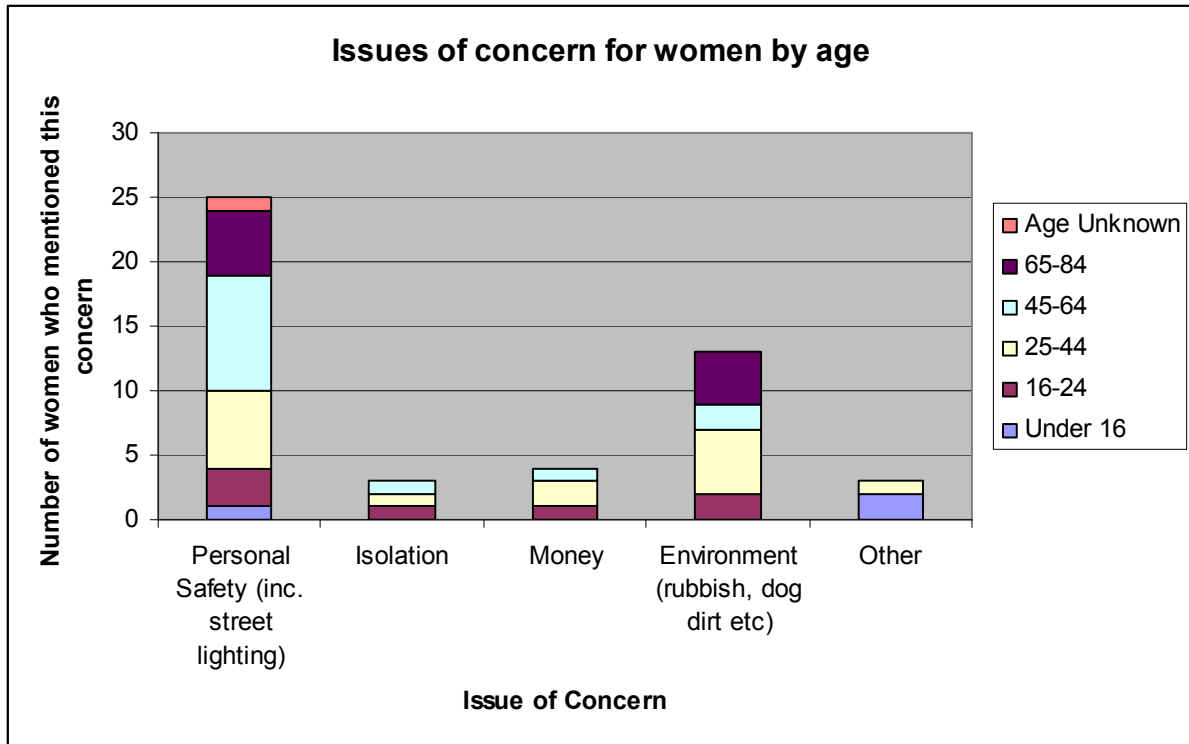


Figure 4.

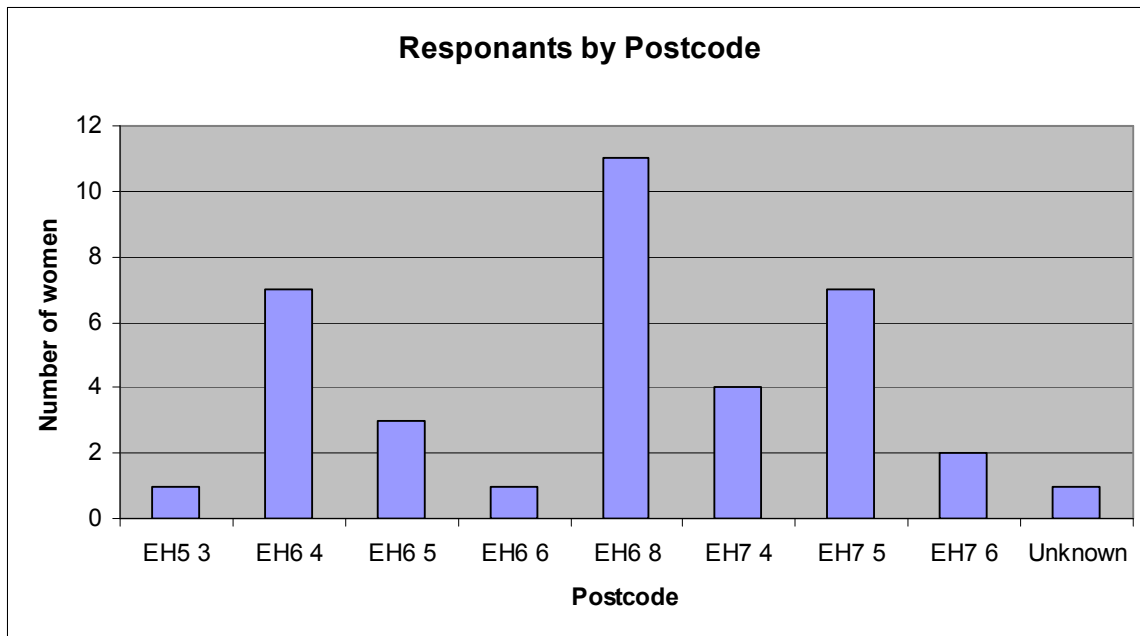


Figure 5.

