

Coalition Experiences of VAWG Charities in the UK

Surviving an Underfunded Sector

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Brussels, 30 July 2025

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Abstract

This thesis explores the coalition experiences of UK-based charities fighting violence against women and girls (VAWG). As the women's sector is chronically underfunded and struggles to meet survivors' needs, coalition-building emerges as a way to mobilise much needed resources organisations cannot access individually. Drawing on a combination of Resource Mobilisation Theory and concepts from the coalition literature, this research analyses interviews with four VAWG charities. Findings indicate that participation in coalitions enabled organisations to mobilise human, cultural, social-organisational, moral, and material resources – both by pooling existing resources and generating new ones through collaboration. Resource mobilisation techniques varied across three coalition types, which I described as ad hoc, periodic, and enduring.

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List of Abbreviations

ACF	Advocacy Coalition Framework
CWJ	Centre for Women's Justice
EVAW	End Violence Against Women Coalition
PPC	Police and Crime Commissioner
RMT	Resource Mobilisation Theory
SARSAS	Somerset and Avon Rape and Sexual Abuse Support
SMC	Social Movement Coalitions
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VCSE	Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise
WGO	Women Girls Organisation
WRC	Women's Resource Centre

I. Introduction

In England and Wales alone, an estimated two million women were victims of VAWG in 2024 (Dodd, 2024). With actual numbers likely being significantly higher due to non-reporting, the scale of the situation led the National Police Chiefs to classify VAWG as a “national threat to public safety” (College of Policing, 2024, p.4). Paradoxically, organisations engaged in addressing VAWG are increasingly underfunded (Rosa, 2022). While funding was never sufficient, it has been drastically reduced since the start of austerity measures in the 2010s (Women’s Budget Group, 2018). The year 2011 alone saw a more than 30% cut in local authority funding for domestic and sexual abuse services, with further reductions occurring in subsequent years (Sanders, Annesley, and Gains, 2019). Between 2019 and 2021, UK development funds dedicated to tackling VAWG shrank by 41%, representing a disproportionate cut compared to overall spending (CARE International, 2023).

In the face of soaring demand, VAWG organisations lack crucial support to meet survivors’ needs (Kitson, 2025), a situation reflected across the wider women’s sector (Damm et al., 2023). Damm and colleagues (2023) show that, out of all grants registered on 360Giving in 2021, less than 2% went to women and girls organisations (WGOs). This acute lack of resources pushed many organisations to scale back their services or even shut down (Kitson, 2025). Of the 211 WGOs responding to Rosa’s 2024 survey, 44% “predicted they might not meet future demand” for lack of means (Kitson, 2025, p.5).

In this stark situation, building coalitions appears as a promising way to mobilise much-needed resources. In the report they conducted for Rosa, Kitson (2025) found that no less than 24% of the 211 WGOs reported “a desire to build alliances and partnerships” (p.22) to strengthen capacity and diversify experience in order to better serve women’s needs. This view is coherent with coalition literature from other fields, which find that successful coalitions can provide resources “over and above resources constituent organisations can mobilise by themselves” (Jenkins, 2001, p.14368).

Amid severe resource constraints, understanding how VAWG charities can mobilise resources through coalition-building is critical. Next to deriving key lessons for a stronger VAWG sector, such research may also inform advocacy for increased support for coalition development. Despite its importance, research on coalition-building within the UK women’s sector remains limited (Adams et

al., 2022). Moreover, existing literature does not appear to explore the diversity of coalition-experiences, although it is key to identify good practices and support varied coalition models. This thesis addresses this gap by asking: How can diverse forms of coalitions enable UK-based VAWG charities to mobilise resources for common goals?

Outline

This research starts by providing background information on the UK's VAWG sector. The theoretical framework then presents a combination of Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT) and concepts from the coalition literature as the most suitable lens for this research. After describing the five resource types defined by Edwards and McCarthy (2004), this research is situated within the wider literature through a literature review. The methodology section then provides information on the research paradigm and justifies qualitative interviewing as the ideal method for this research. It also introduces the four organisations at the centre of this thesis. The following analysis investigates the context in which coalitions emerged and explores interview data across resource types. The discussion highlights trends in resource mobilisation, followed by a series of policy recommendations and a general conclusion. Findings indicate that coalitions of VAWG charities can be effective strategies for mobilising all types of resources in various ways, depending on coalition types.

II. Background

WGOs are organisations part of the UK's Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector that specialise in providing a wide range of services and support to women and girls (Damm et al., 2023). They are generally referred to as the "women's sector" (Women's Resource Centre, 2020, p.4). Charities focusing on fighting VAWG are a core part of the women's sector (Damm et al., 2023). Regardless of their area of expertise, the literature highlights the specificity of WGOs led "by and for" women (Damm et al., 2023, p.17). Additionally, a distinction is drawn for organisations working primarily with "Black and minoritised women" (ibid., p.27), which face additional challenges due to intersectional forms of prejudice.

III. Theoretical framework

As mentioned in the introduction, this research is structured around the following key research question:
How can diverse forms of coalitions enable UK-based VAWG charities to mobilise resources for common goals?

Underlying questions include:

- How do VAWG charities perceive coalition-building? Why?
- How does resource mobilisation take place? Why?
- If viewed positively, what policy changes are necessary to support the development of similar coalition initiatives within the women's sector, or among VAWG charities specifically? Why?

Before diving into the analysis, this section clarifies key concepts of the research questions.

3.1 Resources

Given the scarcity of outside resources available to VAWG organisations, this research considers coalitions as a way to mobilise resources from within. The strategic view of coalition-building inherent to the research question can be traced back to the RMT, of which the central goal is “understanding how groups are able to overcome prevailing patterns of resource inequality in their efforts to pursue social change” (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004, p.118). Similarly, this research aims to look at coalition-building as a means for VAWG organisations to mobilise resources to survive and reach their objectives.

Emerging in the 1970s from a desire to comprehend the wave of social movements of the 1960s (Edwards and Kane, 2014), RMT revolutionised the study of social movements by positioning social movement behaviours as rational and goal-oriented, as opposed to earlier accounts contending “that social movements were the product of nonrational, emotional impulses” (Pichardo, 1988, p.98). Instead of wondering about the reasons a movement is pushing for change, the central question becomes “How can these people organise, pool resources and wield them effectively?” (Fireman and Gamson, 1979, p.9).

A major contribution of RMT literature is its detailed conceptualisation of resources by Edwards and McCarthy (2004). While until the 2000s, the concept of resources in social movement

literature had remained largely ambiguous (Cress and Snow, 1996; McCarthy and Zald, 2002). In 2004, building upon past work, Edwards and McCarthy developed a fivefold classification of resources that distinguishes between moral, cultural, social-organisational, human, and material resources. The holistic scope of this framework allows for an analysis that goes beyond economic dimensions. To fully grasp the dynamics of resource mobilisation within coalitions of VAWG organisations, it is important to explore what each type of resource entails.

Human resources refer to the value that is attached to individuals instead of structures (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004). Human resources depend on individuals' willingness to cooperate. For instance, in a demonstration, it is up to people to decide whether or not to attend and whether or not to contribute their time and skills. They include people's "labour, experience, skills, expertise, and leadership" (p.127). Human resources thus encapsulate labour and physical participation, but also what can be called human capital or "the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being" (OECD, 2007, p.29). There is an inherent notion that the mix of skills specific individuals bring to the table can contribute added value (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004).

Cultural resources also encompass knowledge and skills, but at a collective or group level (Oliver and Marwell, 1992). These resources include specified group knowledge, like advocacy strategies and specific know-how (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004). Within that, an interesting distinction can be made following the typology of Oliver and Marwell (1992). The authors distinguish between production and mobilisation technologies, "sets of knowledge about ways of achieving goals [...]" versus "about ways of accumulating the resources (time and money) necessary for production technologies" (p.5). Moreover, cultural resources include cultural products such as music, literature, reports, films, and other media that can aid in recruitment and advocacy (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004).

Social-organisational resources are resources "that serve as the mobilising structures for social movements" (Edwards and Kane, 2014, p.213). In other words, they are the tangible and intangible platforms through which organisations can spread their message and advance their goals (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004). They comprise both infrastructure and social connections or networks. Examples

include contacts and social media platforms, as well as physical infrastructure like stages or conference rooms.

Moral resources are about image; they include support, celebrity, and, chiefly, legitimacy (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004). In a nutshell, moral resources are what one organisation or movement can channel to increase its validation (Cress and Snow, 1996). Interestingly, actors “who most closely mimic institutionally legitimated features for their particular kind of endeavour” (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004, p.125-126) are more likely to be advantaged in mobilising social approval compared to groups that do not. Moral resources are generally considered to be conferred by external sources (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004). However, they can also be created internally. In this case, the research takes a somewhat blended approach, examining how moral resources are obtained through coalition-building.

And finally, material resources are “what economics would call financial and physical capital” (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004, p. 128). Those include equipment, property, office space, and, most importantly, money. Money is given central attention because, in the end, everything comes back to it (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004). Every form of resource mobilisation has a cost, and money is key to survival. This is especially important to consider in the present case, as this research looks at a sector where funding needs are critical. Money and how other forms of resource mobilisation are related to it thus occupy a central place in this analysis.

Within that framework, however, coalition-building is seen as only one of the ways a social movement can mobilise resources (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004). While its focus and conceptualisation of resources remain relevant, the RMT’s macro-level focus does not provide the adequate tools to analyse resource mobilisation patterns in the present case. There is a need to take a more meso-level approach and zoom into how organisations interact with each other. Moreover, this research looks at resource mobilisation from a *collaborative* standpoint, which is not the prime focus of RMT. For those reasons, this research develops an original approach by combining the resource-centred framework of RMT with conceptual tools from the coalition literature to apply it to cases of interorganisational alliances between UK-based VAWG organisations.

3.2 Coalitions

Social movements are inherently composed of coalitions or “organisational collaborations wherein distinct organisations pool resources to pursue shared goals” (Van Dyke and Amos, 2017, p.1). In the context of this thesis, coalitions are considered successful if collaboration has allowed organisations to reach common goals, even partially. Such goals can be linked to specific policy issues but can also more broadly relate to providing common services and increased access to resources.

As mentioned in the work of McCammon and Minyoung (2015), scholars have situated coalitions as some middle ground between networks and mergers. Tarrow (2005) distinguishes coalitions from networks, arguing that though networks include some connections between organisations, interorganisational ties remain loose and there is “no actual purposive, collaborative action” (McCammon and Minyoung, 2015, p.327). At the other end of the spectrum, Zald and Ash (1966) distinguish coalitions from mergers, contending that a merger “leads to the suppression of previous organisational identities” (p.336).

Next to the degree of formality, coalitions vary along a dimension of temporality (McCammon and Minyoung, 2015). Levi and Murphy (2006) introduced a differentiation between *event* and *enduring* coalitions. As the name suggests, event coalitions are “short-lived, created for a particular protest or lobbying event” (p.655). That does not mean they do not include a high level of involvement from the cooperating organisations, only that cooperation is not planned to last over time (Tarrow, 2005). As a result, there is no need for organisations to agree on long-term goals. However, event coalitions do require organisations to pool resources to act together and thus “may require some sacrifices of organisational autonomy” (Levi and Murphy, 2006, p.655). On the contrary, *enduring* coalitions are meant to last over the long term (Levi and Murphy, 2006). For that reason, they often require participant organisations to establish more formal structures and core principles to ensure the maintenance of collaboration over time.

IV. Literature Review

This research looks at coalitions of VAWG organisations as a way for organisations to mobilise RMT’s different types of resources. As such, it provides a novel perspective combining a specific focus and

theoretical approach. The following paragraphs demonstrate that by situating the present research within the wider literature.

A core strand of the literature on coalitions is related to the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), which is grounded in public policy scholarship. The ACF is centred around analysing changes in policy processes and outcomes, as a result of interactions between so-called “advocacy coalitions” (p.1). In this framework, coalitions are made out of actors from different spheres of society, united by shared values and policy beliefs. For Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), coalitions compete within a policy-subsystem or policy area, to push forward their preferred policy options.

The focus is thus on policy outcomes, next to how coalitions evolve over time and are organised (Carney, 2021). Although resources are considered important for the survival and success of advocacy coalitions, the ACF fails to fully consider coalitions’ potential in mobilising resources. Diametrically opposed is RMT-based literature. As demonstrated in the theoretical framework, RMT is centred around resources but takes too much of a macro-level approach to explore the experiences of coalition partners (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004).

Closest to the present research is the stream of literature around interorganisational alliances or social movement coalitions (SMCs). Situated in social movement scholarship, the emphasis of this area of research is on resource pooling for collective impact and the contextual factors shaping coalitions (Post, 2015). It does put resources at the centre and adopts a more micro-level approach. However, in a substantial portion of existing research, coalitions are perceived as a way to mobilise resources so that the social movement as a whole can grow and endure. Although more micro-level compared to RMT, the focus is thus not on individual organisations. Moreover, resources are rarely considered as holistically as in RMT.

Most often, studies consider some types of resources but rarely are as comprehensive. Quite some studies for example focus on coalitions as a way to mobilise people or human resources for a social movement’s goals (Post, 2015). For example, Jones and colleagues (2001) identify coalition-building as key in the success of a social movement as it allows to effectively form a critical mass and

thereby mobilise many supporters, but they do not elaborate on the impact of coalitions on other types of resources.

Several studies more generally demonstrate that a movement failed because of the absence of coalitions (Post, 2015). Analysing a day care workers strike in Berlin in the winter of 1989-90, Ferree and Roth (1998) for example explain how feminist and labour movement organisations failing to cooperate resulted in the strike having little impact. Although resources occupy a central role in those SMCs studies, organisations are mostly only considered as part of a social movement, not individually.

A portion of SMCs literature does focus on the experiences of individual organisations within coalitions. For example, Gleeson (2013) relied on 57 interviews with community leaders and public agencies staff in Houston to examine how labour have mobilised to “create a wide menu of claims-making options” (p.207) for Latino immigrant workers. Similarly, Tattersall (2020) zooms into the coalition case studies to understand the strengths and difficulties arising from collaboration between unions in the US, Canada, and Australia on specific issues. They conducted more than 120 interviews to gather the insights of city institutions staff, union organisers, and community members. However, while those studies conduct research at a similar level of analysis, they often lack a holistic consideration of mobilised resources, and they do not cover the same theme nor geographical focus as this thesis.

Looking at literature on the women’s sector in the UK, most of it is focused on funding shortages. Some works highlight the general gendered impact of the funding crisis (Sanders et al., 2019; Evans, Bengtsson Mueller, and Hiraide, 2025). Others focus more specifically on the funding crisis inside the women’s sector. The Women’s Resource Centre (2020) looked at WGOs’ grants access in London and explored the barriers they face. Adisa and colleagues (2020) also investigate barriers to funding, but with a focus on VAWG organisations. They relied on a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to formulate recommendations, with some specific to specialist organisations. Damm and colleagues (2023) took a more holistic approach and mapped funding across the women’s sector for the year 2021. All contend that the funding WGOs are able to access is extremely limited, and that smaller specialist organisations and organisations working primarily with Black and minoritised women are facing compounded struggles. Although such previous work is an important basis for the present

research, it is centred on funding only and does not consider alliance-building as a resource-mobilisation strategy.

There is research on mobilisation but rarely centred on alliances of WGOs. Evans and colleagues (2025) demonstrate how feminist policy advocacy was impacted by the funding crisis, as well as Brexit and the COVID pandemic. Aghtaie and Gangoli (2014) review the evolution of feminist activism against VAWG, from the emergence of Second Wave feminism in the UK until the 2010s. They highlight VAWG specialist organisations as key actors.

The focus on coalitions is largely missing most likely because, as put by Adams and colleagues (2022), this form of organising is “almost entirely missing from the women’s voluntary and community sector” (p.30). Similarly to Aghtaie and Gangoli (2014), the authors relate that gap to a lack of resources and many organisations being too busy trying to survive to get together. However, Adams and colleagues (2022) highlight coalitions as a “key route” (p.31). In their words, to increase influence and resource access, the key is “providing training, strengthening relationships, building coalitions and networks” (ibid.). Similarly, Kitson (2025) reported a strong willingness to build partnerships among respondent organisations and highlighted the key importance of solid partnerships to maintain the women’s sector afloat.

In this context, the present research builds upon past work to explore and derive lessons from the experiences of VAWG organisations who engaged in coalitions.

V. Methodology

5.1 A Research Situated in an Interpretivist Paradigm

This research relies on a qualitative methodology and research methods, which are rooted in an interpretivist research paradigm in accordance with the focus of this thesis. To best understand why interviewing stands as the most suitable research method for this research, it is relevant to first review the framework guiding how the research is conducted (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). This framework is called the research paradigm, which combines a specific ontology - or definition of reality - and epistemology - beliefs about how knowledge is constructed (Saunders et al., 2009).

In this research, the paradigm is interpretivist, based on a relativist ontology and a social constructivist epistemology, because the core of the research is making sense of human interaction embedded in a series of social factors (Saunders et al., 2009). Understanding how VAWG organisations get together and how they manage to generate a variety of resources is centred on people's experiences, it is deeply culture- and context-specific. This research paradigm is thus based on a relativist ontology: a conceptualisation of reality as plural, influenced by collective and individual experiences instead of one objective truth (Levers, 2013).

Believing “the truth is revealed through social constructions, language, shared consciousness, and other social interactions [...] interpretivists will design research questions that seek to understand the how and the why—the qualitative questions” (Berryman, 2019, p.2). Coherently, the present research relies on a qualitative research question focused on the experiences of people to explore and understand how coalitions of VAWG organisations form and mobilise resources. In the same vein, this research focus is best aligned with qualitative methodologies as they “provide the means to seek a deeper understanding and to explore the nuances of experiences not available through quantification” (Darlaston-Jones, 2007, p.25).

In the present case, the goal of this research is to make sense of the experiences of people working in UK-based VAWG organisations to understand how interorganisational collaborations can support the mobilisation of resources. Interviews appeared the most suitable method to explore this issue, as it is embedded in the context-specific realities of organisations working in the field (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). Therefore, it cannot be fully explained by literature alone. This is especially true as this phenomenon is generally ill-explored (Adams et al., 2022), reflecting a wider disconnect between public institutions and the realities of field actors (Committee of Public Accounts, 2025). When insights from field-based actors are available, coalitions are rarely the focus of reports and are thus not explored in much depth and/or a cross-coalitions perspective is missing.

The goal of the research is to learn from those unique experiences gained during interviews and to synthesize take-aways into policy recommendations. At its core, this research is thus more oriented towards an inductive, theory-building process rather than theory-testing (Hyde, 2000). This inductive approach allows us to approach interviews without pre-set answers and to welcome unexpected

findings, as the goal of this research is to learn from interviewees' experiences. However, it is important to note that the analysis is structured around frames from established literature. This does not mean that the research is fully deductive either, only that there are some deductive elements in the way the analysis is organised. This interaction between theory and lived experience is coherent with the interpretivist nature of the research (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012).

5.2 The Interviewing Process

The research was approved by the ethics committee of the University of York to ensure compliance with ethical standards. Following approval, the recruitment of participants was conducted via email between February and June 2025. The sampling filtered for UK-based WGOs, with at least part of their activities contributing to ending VAWG. I assessed whether organisations fulfilled those conditions, based on the official websites of organisations. Being part of some form of interorganisational partnership was initially not a criterion for being contacted, as it is difficult to determine from organisations' websites. However, it was an inclusion criterion in the analysis process - a condition that all four organisations interviewed met. Next to criterion-based, sampling was purposive as those criteria were established "based on the researcher's judgement about what potential participants will be most informative" (Moser and Korstjens, 2018, p.11). To learn about the experiences of VAWG organisations, they naturally appeared best informed.

Once selected, organisations were sent a short email inviting them to participate in a study along with some information and a form attesting of the ethical character of the research. Interview dates were then arranged by email and participating organisations were asked to sign a consent form. Four 30-45 minutes interviews were conducted with representatives from the four different organisations. On top of that, two organisations provided follow-up written answers, to provide more detail and/or answer some questions the interviewee felt unsure about during the interview. Interviews were semi-structured, so as to cover different areas of focus while leaving space for the interviewee to expand on their experiences (Alshenqeeti, 2014). They were based on an interview guide, which is reported in the appendix. Interviews were recorded with participants' explicit approval. The data was then transcribed and anonymised in accordance with the ethics form.

Next, the data was organised manually through deductive based on the five types of resources defined by Edwards and McCarthy (2004). During the analysis process, I realised that some of the data could allow readers to identify the organisations interviewed. Post interviews, I thus asked for explicit consent by email to lift organisational anonymity. Interviewees remained anonymised, as there was no need to disclose their identities.

5.3 Participating Organisations

Before diving into the analysis, it is important to provide some background information on the four organisations at the centre of this research.

The Women Resource Centre (WRC) - Interview with Daisy and written answers by Mary

The WRC is a charity whose core aim is to support women's organisations in the UK - with a focus on London - and to provide them with resources "to survive the funding crisis" in Anna's words. This thesis is particularly interested in the WRC's leading role in the London VAWG Consortium and its Ascent project, as it presents a case of cooperation among VAWG organisations which has been particularly successful, as indicated by Daisy. As such, it offers valuable insights for this research.

The London VAWG Consortium is a partnership of 28 organisations which was facilitated by the WRC, with the aim to strengthen the VAWG sector (WRC, n.d). Ascent is one of the Consortium's core projects, funded by London Councils, within which VAWG organisations collaborate to deliver specialist services to survivors of violence in six areas: "Advice and Counselling, Domestic and Sexual Violence Helplines, Ending Harmful Practices, Specialist Refuge, Prevention, Support Services to Organisations" (WRC, n.d., p.5). The WRC has played a leading role inside Ascent, especially in the Support Services to Organisations branch, where they lead a collaboration with 5 other organisations to "address the long-term sustainability needs of organisations providing services to those affected by sexual and domestic violence". Ascent is thus an enduring coalition, in which the WRC has been playing a leading role.

Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ) - Interview with Ella

The CWJ is a charity aiming to combat VAWG through legal avenues, with cases distributed nationwide. This includes holding the state institutions accountable of their legal duties to prevent

violence, as well as to support civil society actors trying to challenge bodies or laws perpetrating VAWG (CWJ, n.d.). Doing so, the CWJ has been involved in a wide range of projects, partnering with different actors and organisations.

This thesis is particularly interested in the CWJ's temporary collaboration with Rape Crisis England and Wales and EVAW around the issue of police access to rape victims' counselling records, as it provides a clear example of a coalition reaching a policy goal. Ella qualified it as a "big victory". Indeed, their combined advocacy succeeded in raising the legal threshold for when the police can request access to counselling notes (Rape Crisis England and Wales, 2024). It is more than an event coalition because it was conducted over several months. However, it was never intended as a permanent collaboration either, although connections remain. In that context, I described the counselling records coalition as ad hoc.

Filia - Interview with Anna

Filia is a charity part of the Women's Liberation Movement (Filia, n.d.). It aims to amplify women's voices and defend their rights. They do so through a variety of projects, including policy consultations, advocacy campaigns, artistic projects, etc. A core initiative of Filia, which this thesis is particularly interested in, is their annual women's rights conference. It brings together different organisations and actors, both from across the UK as well as various other countries. There, they share their experiences and activities related to empowering women and protecting their rights. There is "a particular focus on those less often heard purposefully silenced" (p.3), including survivors of violence.

Although with a broader focus, Filia and organisations participating in the conference collaborate to advance women's rights in a holistic manner, which includes the fight against VAWG. Looking at the type of coalition, it is somewhat of a hybrid case because this collaborative conference appears as an event-coalition, that repeats year after year. This means that, although it is centred around a particular event, there is a sense of continuity and progression: the event grows stronger with time, enriched with experience and connections. Taking this into account, Filia's collaborative conference can be described as what I called a periodic coalition.

SARSAS - Interview with Laura

SARSAS is a charity assisting victims of sexual abuse through counselling and specialist services, mostly in the Southwest of England (SARSAS, n.d.). This thesis is particularly interested in the Avon & Somerset Sexual Violence Alliance (Avon & Somerset Alliance), a coalition of organisations aiming to support each other to best answer the needs of survivors of abuse and sexual assault. As Laura told me, although there were already close links before, the Avon & Somerset Alliance was formalised about six years ago with SARSAS as the lead organisation. It is meant to perdure over the long-term, making it an enduring coalition.

However, as put by Laura, the Avon & Somerset Alliance “isn’t static”. Partner organisations have one big contract together, and for the rest, they can decide whether they want to join in depending on the purpose and funding offered in a bid – as explained by Laura. In Laura’s words, “the core Avon and Somerset Sexual Violence Alliance consists of ourselves, Womankind and the Southmead Project”. And then there are other organisations that join for specific projects, as she explained, like The Bridge and The Greenhouse (SARSAS, n.d.).

VI. Analysis

This analysis chapter answers the main research question: How can diverse forms of coalitions enable UK-based VAWG charities to mobilise resources for common goals?

It is structured around two of its sub-questions:

- 1) How do VAWG charities perceive coalition-building and why?
- 2) How does resource mobilisation take place?

Answering 1), the present chapter starts by demonstrating organisations perceived coalition-building as a way to survive a sector-wide economic threat. I argue this is why coalition-building took place despite a context of resource deprivation and highlight the political dimension of systematic underfunding. I then explain how VAWG charities interviewed view coalition-building as a survival strategy for themselves, but also to pursue the collective aim of keeping the women’s sector afloat. The second part of this analysis chapter then answers 2), looking at the various ways coalitions allow for resource mobilisation across each of Edwards’ and McCarthy’s five resource types.

6.1 Why Collaborate?

Economic grievances perceived as threats to survival

The coalition experiences of VAWG organisations at the centre of this thesis stand out by emerging in a context where resources are scarce. Although “limited resources makes pooling resources attractive” (Van Dyke and Amos, 2017, p.7) coalitions are generally considered unlikely to emerge when resources are scarce (Zald and McCarthy, 1980). In this case, this thesis argues, coalition-building emerged because there seemed to be no other way. The argument is that acute deprivation of financial resources created a context of common economic grievances for survival, which pushed organisations to build coalitions as a way to survive a threatening context. It should however be stressed that, even in the present context, a bare minimum of resources is still necessary for coalitions to emerge - reason why coalition cases remain limited in the VAWG sector. Otherwise, organisations are “too busy just trying to keep their head above water” to engage in anything else, as reported by Laura from SARSAS.

This relates to a body of literature finding that coalitions can be induced by political threats (Reese, 2005; Fetner, 2008). McCammon and Campbell (2002) argue that political threats make coalitions particularly likely as, in situations where movement goals or even movement existence are under threat, incentives to form coalitions to increase chances of survival are quite high. This can include economic threats (Brooker and Meyer, 2018). As put by Van Dyke and Amos (2017), “economic grievances may stimulate coalition formation as groups band together to work for redress of those grievances”, much like political ones (p.8). For example, Borland (2008) analyses how economic crises in Argentina played a key role in getting different movements fighting for women’s rights to “overcome their ideological and identity-based differences to work together” (Van Dyke and Amos, 2017, p.8).

This thesis argues that economic grievances, in this case, *are* inherently political because they reflect how women, and especially women from marginalised groups, are not given priority by the state. In the words of the Filia representative, it seems that “women, 51-52% of the population, are always treated as a minority and...and one of the least significant minorities”. In a 2025 report, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2025) reported being “extremely concerned” (p.3) about the National Audit

Office's finding that the Home office had “historically underspent its own budget allocated to the VAWG Strategy, by an average of 15% between 2021-22 and 2023-24”. This, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2025) concluded, “will have undoubtedly contributed to the lack of progress in this area” (p.3).

As mentioned by scholars from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the government “*should* prioritise and deprioritise different areas according to its objectives, preferences and changing circumstances” (Boileau, Warner, and Zaranko, 2025, p.13). However, this thesis argues the systematic lack of prioritisation of services crucial to about half of society is not normal. It reflects that the needs of women, and especially women from vulnerable groups (Damm et al., 2023), are not considered a priority for the government. And that is, in essence, political.

A combination of strategic needs and collective motivations

As put by Daisy from the WRC, the core of the issue is that “the whole commissioning agenda is pitting organisations against each other” as they have to compete for limited resources. Against that background, she said: “The only way you could combat this whole...like competitive commissioning environment was, you know, to develop a partnership”. The coalition experiences at the centre of this thesis thus emerge with strategic but also often collective motivations to support other organisations, or even the VAWG sector as a whole. As Daisy expressed it: “if everyone's just out for themselves, we're all done for. [...] You have to sort out your differences because there's something bigger at stake”. The same larger goal of supporting the movement was echoed by Anna from Filia, who said a core goal of the organisation's projects and conferences was to support and provide spaces to “build the movement forward”. This is generally reflected in organisations collaborating, although they can only engage within the limits of their scarce resources.

Coalitions emerging with those motivations and in a context of financial resource deprivation contradict early accounts of RMT defending that “grievances stemming from structural strains and relative deprivation are secondary or possibly irrelevant to movement participation” while the availability of resources is key (Jenkins, 2001, p.14368). That stance on grievances playing little to no role has been debated by many scholars (Oliver and Marwell, 1992; Van Dyke and McCammon, 2010; Soma, 2021). Klandermans (2004) notably argues that grievances are “at the root of collective political

action” (p.362), showing how identity and ideology play key roles in influencing participation in alliances. Olson (1968) argues that grievances play a role in influencing participation but famously contends that actors will not contribute to a larger cause without the incentive of getting selective benefits or additional benefits dedicated to a certain group.

In the present case, notions of selective benefits do play a role because, as resources are limited, organisations have to consider the cost-benefit ratio of participation. This is why the WRC representative expressed that they cannot afford to draw on their reserves in the same way they did to start the Ascent project to support similar projects in other regions, and that the CWJ can only engage in ad hoc coalitions. However, contributing to the collective benefit of maintaining the sector afloat also plays an important role in the formation of those coalitions. This is consistent with established literature that both selective and collective benefits can influence a group’s decision to participate in a coalition, possibly in different proportions (Jenkins, 2001).

Here, this thesis argues, both even “interact”, in the words of Klandermans (2004, p.362), as the selective benefit of organisational economic survival can be intrinsically connected to the larger goal of continuing to sustain the VAWG charity sector. For example, the WRC aims to mobilise resources to continue to function as an organisation, but also to be able to promote a “thriving and diverse women’s sector”, which they describe as their main goal. It is thus crucial to distance organisations’ resource-based decisions from neoliberalist tendencies of resource maximisation. Organisations have to be strategic in their coalition choices. However, that stems from a context of resource deprivation and motivations to support a non-profit sector, not pure profit-seeking.

6.2 Mobilising Resources

The scarcity of financial resources negatively impacts organisations’ capacity to access and sustain other types of resources. For example, it is quite difficult to mobilise and retain staff without funding (Violence Against Women and Girls Organisations, 2024). And as organisations “need to have or acquire the human and financial resources to perform collaborative work”, this impacts all kinds of resources (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001, p.255). E.g., it is challenging to mobilise cultural resources without people to share knowledge inside an organisation or funds to acquire it from external sources.

The lack of resources is thus larger than money, and coalition-building emerges as potential way for VAWG charities to mobilise a variety of needed resources. The following paragraphs explore the experiences of the organisations interviewed as well as insights from the literature, based on the fivefold resources classification of Edwards and McCarthy (2004).

Human

Coalitions can somewhat alleviate staff shortages by combining personnel. Ella from the CWJ notably explained how the Centre would have never managed to successfully change the law on police access to counselling records without pooling staff and other resources with Rape Crisis England and Wales and EVAW. For example, as she said, “we wouldn’t have the resources at CWJ to start lobbying MP’s, that’s really time consuming”. Among other things, combining staff thus played a big role in allowing organisations to reach their common goals. However, Ella also highlighted that such resource pooling can only happen when they can “find the capacity within all the different organisations at the same time”. Collaboration can thus successfully mobilise human resources in the short term, but opportunities for such collaboration seem limited.

Combining staff also takes place in long-term arrangements as exemplified by SARSAS and alliance partners. Laura for example told me about dedicated staff sometimes coming together to organise fundraisers or communication content. Laura highlighted how combining staff is also key in caring for staff’s well-being and support, saying: “we only have a couple of communications workers, so that can be quite an isolating role if you’re the only one”. Another strong example she told me about was about wanting to create a “support peer space for people of colour working within the organisations”. However, there are only very few people of colour working for individual organisations. In this context, collaboration allowed SARSAS and partners to create “an alliance-wide peer support space where people of colour within the organisation can go, you know, can go and meet up and for well-being and support”. Investing in staff well-being is not only essential from a moral point of view but also contributes to people being in the right state of mind to make full use of their potential (OECD, 2007). Collaborating in that way thus further the common goals of the Avon & Somerset Alliance of providing high-quality services to survivors.

Interviews have shown that successful collaboration can also increase membership. This is for example reflected in the case of Filia. Filia is involved in many different projects, chief of which is a yearly conference bringing together different organisations and actors active in the defence of women's rights in different areas. All collaborate to provide attendees with empowering experience and knowledge. Anna, who is part of Filia, explained to me that this collaborative conference has seen its audience substantially increase in recent years, going from 600 to an estimated audience of around 3000 for this year. This shows how collaboration with other actors through the conference has been allowing Filia to reach its goal of strengthening and building a general movement to protect women's rights.

That successful collaboration has allowed Filia to reach more people, and also to increase its membership. Initially "13 angry women", Filia has become strong of 160 volunteers who want to dedicate some of their time and skills to this initiative. As Anna expressed, everyone contributes depending on their individual possibilities and interests:

"You know, someone who's interested in arts might volunteer to help put the arts program together. It might be someone who's a bit of a caretaker, will, you know, do, sort of like the looking after the volunteers, or the ensuring all the access requirements are sorted and etc [...]
Rather than say: we want you to do this job; we say to our volunteers: what is it that you can bring?"

Next to the number of people, collaboration has thus mobilised human resources in the form of individual knowledge and skills, which contributes to Filia's goal.

This holds true for individual skills and knowledge sharing inside the conference. Anna for example told me about how the conference brought together someone doing work around female genital mutilation (FGM) and another activist involved in community-based work in health education. In Anna's words, this is "fantastic" because "you're able to bring them together, and say, you know, you need to have a chat with so and so and create something".

Successful collaboration has thus allowed for human resources mobilisation - by combining staff and promoting their well-being, as well as through increased membership and the promotion of individual skills sharing.

Cultural

Coalitions can also be a way to mobilise cultural resources to reach common goals (Oliver and Marwell, 1992; Edwards and McCarthy, 2004). The literature is generally united in saying that combining expertise from different groups is beneficial to pursue coalition objectives (Levi and Murphy, 2006; Gawerc, 2020). This is well demonstrated by the collaboration efforts of the CWJ with Rape Crisis and EVAW. Ella explained how their combined efforts to change the law on police access to rape victims' counselling records were strong and eventually successful because they could "draw on the expertise of each organisation". She said that tasks division happened very naturally according to the focus and skills of each organisation:

"EVAW, they do a lot of the public affairs work [...] so they were doing all of that side and lobbying MP's. We were doing more the legal side, getting legal input from barristers and really...sort of put together legal arguments [...] and then Rape Crisis, they've got their own network of Rape Crisis centres or the case studies. They're sort of grassroots, seeing how this is impacting in reality on the day-to-day."

Ella explained that this combination of specialised know-how was key in reaching their policy objective, echoing the stance of Haydu (2012) that "diverse backgrounds and skills enhance the ability to respond in creative ways and to apply varied forms of pressure on authorities" (p.100).

Next to combining know-how, cultural resource mobilisation can happen through information exchange and knowledge training in-between groups (Post, 2015). It is highly relevant for individual groups as "organizations in coalitions can develop new knowledge and skills that would be otherwise difficult to acquire independently" (p.288) and be better equipped to reach their goals. The organisation of training sessions was mostly reported by organisations in enduring coalitions, specifically the WRC and SARSAS. This seems quite logical, as training takes time and is thus part of a skill-building effort over the long term. The WRC for example provides specialised training as part of the Ascent coalition project, which are specifically adapted to the needs of women's organisations, including their Ascent partners. Those collaborative training were identified by Daisy as one of the core factors that enable Ascent projects to work. Thereby, they successfully contribute to strengthening the women's sector, fulfilling the goal of the WRC and its Ascent partners.

To ensure that knowledge sharing remains best tailored to support partner organisations and contribute to goals, several organisations mentioned another important form of knowledge sharing: feedback. Filia for example asks for feedback from participating organisations to improve year after year. This form of group knowledge sharing is key because it contributes to ensuring that the conference continues to fulfil the common objective of supporting a strong women's rights movement. The mechanism is similar in the case of the WRC's annual needs assessment. Laura from SARSAS notably mentioned interorganisational feedback sessions on evaluation methods as a key example of knowledge sharing. She said: "there are different methods of evaluation [...] we're learning from each other on how we evaluate our services [...] how we how we prove that our services are making a difference". Whether from users of services or partner organisations, that form of group knowledge sharing is key for improvement, and hence, to contributing to organisations' goals.

Moreover, interviewed organisations have generally mobilised cultural resources by creating joint cultural products, including joint reports, media content, and a conference in the case of Filia. Those common cultural products importantly contribute to their advocacy and thus to successfully reaching common goals. For example, Anna from Filia told me that the feedback they have been getting about the "hard information that is shared by speeches, leaflets, films, ..." is that "it's helped women with a variety of different issues, and enabled them to access the content in, in a way perhaps they might not have done otherwise". This clearly shows how cultural products, through the conference as a collaborative initiative, contributed to Filia's goal.

Another, more policy-focused illustration of that are the joint reports of the CWJ with partner organisations. Ella explained how, though they did not directly lead to policy change, joint reports played an important role in reaching their goal. She described their joint reports as a "big contribution" to a broader shift in public narrative towards more awareness of the systemic lack of justice for rape victims. And that context - she added - along with prolonged advocacy by different actors, eventually led to a policy victory. This is coherent with accounts of the literature, Edwards and McCarty (2004) notably highlighting that cultural products can play an important role in building "capacity for collective action" (p.126).

Organisations thus generally managed to successfully mobilise cultural resources to contribute to common objectives - through combining expertise, information exchange and training, as well as cultural products.

Social-organisational

Through its collaborative conference, Filia organised a platform for activists and groups to share their experience. This supports a strong women's rights movement by fostering the exchange of knowledge and connections and leads to new initiatives. Anna told me about how Filia helped raise awareness about abusive men exploiting the Hague Convention to claim full custody of children in cases where the survivor fled the country with them to escape abuse. In her words:

“from meeting at Filia and kind of like different women recognising the problem, there's now an international organisation that meets and is working with the Hague to try and improve that piece of legislation to make it safer for some others who are being subjected to abuse.”

Importantly, Filia's conferences also support a strong women rights' movement by empowering both speakers and attendees to feel inspired and supported in their work and everyday lives. As put by Anna, “there's this really important work that goes on just by being in that space [...] connections that women make and build, but also just the strength to continue doing some of the work, because you feel that sisterhood.” She told a powerful story of a woman who had been disbelieved by the police and could speak about it at the conference, finding a platform to validate her experience and feel supported. In Anna's words “ finally, she was heard, she was listened to, she was believed. And that was huge for her.”

In a more structural way, organisations with a leading role inside coalitions, like the WRC and SARSAS, provide partner organisations with the social and organisational structure necessary for collaboration to work and successfully contribute to common goals.

The WRC brought organisations together and set up collaboration efforts in what literature calls an “entrepreneur” (Levi and Murphy, 2006, p.657) or “bridge worker” (Bystydzienski and Schacht, 2001, p.9) role. It emphasised the importance of them being a “neutral” actor to successfully gather organisations. Daisy said that collaborations need “an organisation like WRC who is just...we're neutral [...] we don't compete for the same money that these organisations do, so there's no...we have to make

sure that there's no conflict of interest basically in our role. She explained how that neutral role was important in maintaining the coalition over time: “we are the kind of arbiters and main kind of conflict resolution organisation because we can be”. Those declarations are coherent with the literature, which contends that successful bridge workers need to “serve as ambassadors of goodwill between the groups [...] and thus are in a position to initiate dialogue” (Bystydzienski and Schacht, 2001, p.9).

Those efforts are also more likely to be successful if they have pre-existing relationships with groups and/or are capable of “pre-committing resources to potential coalition members” (Levi and Murphy, 2006, p.657). For example, Laura from SARSAS explained that a key reason that the Avon & Somerset Alliance could exist was good relationships between like-minded CEO’s “who all felt similar” and decided to collaborate more closely. As to pre-committing resources, the WRC for example committed money from its own reserves to get the Ascent projects started. As Daisy said: “ We were there from the very beginning. We coordinated the consortium, got the organisation together. [...] We funded it from the beginning, before we managed to get a bit of funding for it.” She added that it's a shame because it is “a really good model for trying to keep the sector afloat and give them more power” but it requires an organisation able to sponsor it in the beginning. And, given the realities of the sector, that is really challenging. She said the WRC would like to sponsor many more initiatives like Ascent but cannot afford to do so.

In terms of long-term social-organisational resources, the London Consortium provides Ascent organisations with a structure to bid for contracts, which allows partner organisations to access more funding as a big, more trustable partnership. Similarly, SARSAS and partner organisations can bid as an alliance. Providing structure can also come in the shape of ensuring funding distribution and good contract management. Laura, who works at SARSAS told me that all the money comes to them and we “subcontract that to our partners by sending them a contract, if you like”. They do the financial reporting, and make sure risk registers are complete for every contract. Such a supporting role is crucial in supporting partner organisations and services, thereby contributing to the Avon & Somerset Alliance’s goal.

Another key aspect of long-term support are common values and conflict mitigation mechanisms. Laura mentioned a key memorandum of understanding with “kind of basic rules and

principles as to how we'll work together as a partnership. It covers what to do in conflict and resolution. Daisy from the WRC echoed that and added: “There’s a lot of power dynamics there because there's a difference in resources. And so, you know, you really need that [...] governance stuff in order to create a level playing field between all those organisations”.

Daisy for the WRC also emphasised the key importance of such mechanisms, which is reflected in the literature. Several authors emphasise the importance of creating “shared spaces” for groups from “different social backgrounds and with disparate experiences and identities” to create successful coalitions (Bystydzienski and Schacht, 2001, p.8). Those are established through a process of open dialogue trying to understand each other’s situated views to derive inclusive common values and purposes. Echoing what Daisy was saying, common values have to come with institutional arrangements “enforcing compliance with the rules and norms of the coalition” (Levi and Murphy, 2006, p.657), including conflict resolution mechanisms, for the coalition to perdure over the long term.

This especially supporting role of SARSAS and the WRC within coalitions as respective “lead organisation” - in Laura’s words - can be related to earlier accounts in the literature. One relevant example, though more extreme in its leadership, is the Center for Community Change (CCC) in the US, which led the Fair Immigration Reform movement coalition (Post, 2015). The CCC engages in more policy-oriented training and with a wider range of organisations. However, each of the three have the same motivation: to provide support “tailored to enhance the capacities of its grassroots partners” (p.278). Consistently, lead organisations play a crucial role in supporting and empowering non-profits they collaborate with.

Across all organisations, collaborations have substantially mobilised social-organisational resources in the form of contact networks. For example, Ella from the CWJ explained how each organisation contributed their own network to their common goal of changing the law on the counselling records: EVAW knows “the right people to speak to their right people” to lobby MP’s, the CWJ “had links with lawyers in Australia” to push for a similar model, and Rape Crisis relied on “their own network of rape crisis centres” to bring a grassroot perspective.

Ella also emphasised that successive campaigns build a very tight network of organisations working on different but highly interconnected issues. As it is always the same people, strong links of

trust and respect have emerged, which she said heavily contributed to the success of the counselling records campaign:

I think one of the reasons why it worked so well on that particular campaign is because...just everybody got on really well. [...] It's a group of people who already know each other quite well from other places, you know from other forums and another joint working that we've done in other places...on other times [...] the personal relationships were really good. There's a lot of mutual respect.

This is consistent with the literature. Jones and colleagues (2001) for example looked at social movement organisations organising events and reported they consistently presented an informal organisational structure. Moreover, they found that, over time, “groups build up extensive contacts and the accompanying trust” (p.228) which contributed to successful cooperation. Moreover, there is a consensus in the literature: (pre-existing) relationships of trust are key in the success of coalition efforts (Levi and Murphy, 2006; Arnold, 2011; Post, 2015).

All in all, the organisations interviewed reported how collaboration successfully mobilised social-organisational resources in the form of providing platforms for a movement to grow and structures to sustain it, as well as connections.

Moral

Coalitions can also be a way to mobilise moral resources in the form of increased legitimacy or credibility (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004). Interviewees notably reported that the collective size of coalitions allowed them to leverage more legitimacy. As explained by Daisy from the WRC, small organisations delivering local services tend to not enjoy much credibility from external actors while “being part of a kind of bigger consortium [...] has then given a kind of, yeah, more credibility to those organisations and has given them more power.” This “power”, as she says, materialises in more chances to access funding and “a stronger policy voice in London.” This is coherent with established literature. Adisa and colleagues (2020) notably report accounts from smaller specialist organisations being perceived as less trustable and thus “bankable” (p.36) due to their size. As emphasised by Laura from SARSAS, the credibility brought by partnerships can also result in more flexibility from authorities, which is really helpful in reaching common goals. In her words “If I go to them and say, look, this is

what we need to use this money on right now, they will trust us as an alliance to deliver [...] and that's massive.

Another strong, more specific example is the Baroness Bertin, member of the House of Lords, going forward with introducing amendments to raise the legal threshold for police access to rape victims' counselling records thanks to the joint campaigning of CWJ and partner organisations. As highlighted by Ella:

“Baroness Bertin said to us the fact that there's so many different organisations involved in this campaign means that I kind of trust that this is a really strong issue, that if just one organisation had come to her and say, oh, we want to do this, she probably wouldn't have got involved. But when she saw this whole range of organisations [...] we're all coming together in that. That's what made her feel that this is a really strong issue.”

This is a very clear example of how being in coalition provided legitimacy because, as Ella explained, trust from the policymaker was rooted in them acting together. “It just wouldn't have happened if we'd done it on our own,” Ella said.

Like this example, it seems that the moral resources mobilised by acting in coalitions can lead to what Kingdon (2014) calls streams “coupling” (p.179), and for so-called “policy entrepreneurs” (ibid.) to step up in view of a window of opportunity - which is crucial for advocacy and policy-focused organisations. In Kingdon's (2014) multiple streams framework, policy entrepreneurs are actors with some influence on the policy process due to their expertise or by being delegate of a larger group. When a policy solution comes to match a problem and corresponds to the broader political sentiment, it creates a window for the policy entrepreneur to push for such a policy option. One could argue that the CWJ and partner organisations acting together contributed to streams coupling by reflecting a general mood in adherence with that option. Of course, there are probably other factors involved in that perception, too, for example CWJ's shared report mentioned in the cultural resources section. As a result, Baroness Bertin, acting similarly to a policy entrepreneur, stepped in to advocate for this option with decisionmakers, as her expertise allowed her to do.

Moral resources are generally awarded by external actors “known to possess them” who transfer them to an organisation (Edwards, McCarthy, 2004, p.126). However, in those cases, coalition partners

manage to create them *from the inside* by being together. That credibility is then reinforced by the support given by public authorities. E.g., in the case of the WRC, this would be the endorsement of the Ascent's legitimacy by public authorities by awarding them more contracts or policy voice. However, moral resource holders are not limited to public authorities, the endorsement of a local group or well-known figure from civil society can be just as beneficial (Edwards, McCarthy, 2004, p.124).

A good example of that is Filia, whose conference was able to grow through successful collaboration and attract more and more people, including "feminists you would, you know, recognise the names of when they come in, Julie Bindel, Jones Smith, etc. as well as grassroots activists that are making a huge difference in their local communities with the projects that they're working on." Whether recognised by people at a national or local level, the participation of socially valued people also brings increased legitimacy to the initiative, which allows it to grow further and to support a strong women's rights movement. The increase in success is notably reflected in the audience becoming increasingly international. As Anna said, people are "coming from Canada, from Australia, from, you know, across Europe, because it's the event they want to speak at".

In conclusion, organisations interviewed have mobilised moral resources by harnessing the size and collective strength of coalition efforts, as well as by bringing in highly regarded people.

Material

Money is absolutely crucial for organisations to reach their goals, in itself and because it is closely related to other types of resources (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). Interviewed organisations have managed to mobilise financial resources through collaboration. Daisy from the WRC told me Ascent played a crucial role in keeping partner organisations afloat, while some of them were "on the brink of closure", as she said. This is because the size and influence of the coalition have increased participating organisations' access to funding and enabled them to begin reshaping funding structures to be more accessible to organisations.

As mentioned before, the size of the coalition has provided organisations with increased legitimacy, going along with higher chances to access financial support as the consortium bids for them. In Laura's words, the Avon & Somerset Alliance has provided "absolutely credibility and the finances that go along with that!" Looking at numbers, the VAWG Consortium the WRC is a part of has "secured

£29.4m worth of grants” (WRC, n.d., p.4) since 2014, reflecting the positive impact of its coalition. This is consistent with previous works. When looking at Black-led micro-organisations in the UK, Manful and Willis (2024) found that entering a partnership with a more meso-size allowed them to be supported through the bidding process. Moreover, the increased credibility driving from the already trusted lead organisation and the size of the partnership made it easier to access funding.

Moreover, and Daisy stressed that was “a massive win”, the Ascent consortium has successfully pushed for the restructuring of the London Victim and Witness Fund, an important one-year contract. It used to only be accessible to generic organisations. However, thanks to prolonged efforts of the consortium, it was opened to VAWG organisations, enabling specialist organisations to bid. This is hugely important, Daisy said, because it shows that commissioning can be adapted towards “responding to our needs”.

Another example is the funding of Filia’s collaborative conference which, as successful collaboration has been making the initiative grow, has been able to become financially sufficient while remaining as inclusive as possible. Through collaboration in this meaningful project, Filia and participating organisations have successfully contributed to the common goal of supporting a stronger movement for women’s rights. They sell tickets for the conference and “try to price it so it's literally just enough to cover what we need”, said Anna. This allows Filia to be financially sustainable and organise the conference year after year.

To keep it accessible to as many people as possible they have developed different mechanisms. There is “what we call solidarity tickets so women are able to...buy tickets themselves or just buy a ticket for another woman”, said Ella. There is also a larger scheme called “Friends of Filia”, which Ella explained in the following way: “that's like a monthly donation that women can put in. You know, if it's maybe it's a pound a month, but we used all of that money as well to assist women to get to Filia who might not be able to otherwise”. The conference also moves around the country year by year, so that, if travel costs are the barrier, they can be somewhat mitigated. Through those combined systems, money was mobilised so that the collaborative project of the conference can keep happening and contribute to a stronger women’s movement. At the same time, it is important to note that balancing mechanisms have been put in place for this goal to be pursued in an inclusive manner.

Collaboration has thus successfully enabled participating organisations to mobilise material resources (chiefly money) to pursue their goals. This was made possible as the greater size, structure, and increased legitimacy provided by the coalition enabled organisations to access more funding. Moreover, successful collaboration led to increased membership and audience, which allowed for financial self-sufficiency.

Although specifying she could only talk for the Avon and Somerset Alliance, Laura from SARSAS reported that investing in coalitions allows to save resources over the long term because it makes organisations more resilient and optimises resource use in reaching goals. This is consistent with Kitson's work (2025), in which they reported that, in this context of resource deprivation, "the future of the women and girls' social sector will depend on forging strong partnerships" (p.5). Next to resource mobilisation in the present, coalition-building thus holds potential to make the VAWG sector - and more largely the Women's sector - more financially sustainable in the long-term.

VII. Discussion

Building upon the analysis chapter, this discussion explores *why* resource mobilisation took place in different ways for different VAWG charities. As demonstrated above, forming coalitions can successfully mobilise much needed resources in different ways. To best learn from those experiences, it is relevant to note some tendencies depending on coalition types and purpose. Those conclusions do not pretend to be representative; the goal is only to offer suggestions that should be further explored in future research.

Looking at human resources, Filia was the only organisation reporting mobilising in the form of mobilising an increasing number of people. This is likely due to a number of factors, including the type of activities they engage in and level of financial independence. Filia's conference, instead of providing services directly to survivors or engaging in advocacy with authorities, aims at reaching more and more people to build a general movement supporting women's rights and fighting VAWG. Thanks to that, it was able to include a small financial component, which allows it to grow year by year. Being a periodic coalition repeating year after year also likely contributes to greater financial sustainability as resources are concentrated around a particular event.

The remaining organisations have quite different focus and are not financially independent, making it difficult for their coalition efforts to grow as much in terms of the number involved. Instead, collaborations are crucial because they allow them to combine and care for the staff they already have. Enduring coalitions - the WRC and SARSAS mentioned bringing staff together with partner organisations to pursue coalition objectives. Because of the nature of the coalition, those arrangements tend to be more long-term, like commonly organising Ascent trainings or successively working at different organisations of the Avon & Somerset. In contrast, pooling staff efforts reported by the CWJ are meant to be more short-term and thus less structurally organised into formal initiatives and job positions. This is coherent with the CWJ engaging in ad hoc coalition efforts where - although the same organisations are often in contact - there is no formally established partnership planned to last over time.

A somewhat similar pattern can be observed in the mobilisation of cultural resources. The CWJ engages in skills sharing over the short term, compared to enduring coalitions that engage in recurrent mutual training. For that exact reason, it seems that the level of cultural resource mobilisation can be higher in ad hoc coalitions - the CWJ reporting an important contribution of group skills. As ad hoc coalitions take place over the short-term and only in specific cases where partner organisations are willing to give it priority, participating organisations might be able to leverage a higher level of resources than they would be able to if they had to sustain it over the long-term.

Interestingly, all engaged in the creation of joint cultural products, which seem to be cost-efficient ways to pursue common goals. In a similar way, all organisations significantly engaged in contacts sharing and network-building, which emerge as cost-efficient ways to support common goals. In a context where financial resources are scarce and where organisations generally wish to support their coalition partners, this behaviour seems logical.

In terms of structure, enduring coalitions seem to provide the most consistent and established frameworks. The WRC and SARSAS took leading roles in creating, sustaining, and ensuring funding access to the coalition through structure. Periodic coalitions, in this case Filia and organisations collaborating for the conference, appear to offer a high level of structure. Filia's conference *is* a structure for people to spread their messages. However, that structure is only available once a year. Finally, ad

hoc coalitions, such as the one the CWJ engaged in, do not seem to follow a defined structure, which is coherent with their short-term organising.

For moral resources, differences seem to be explained mostly by differing focuses. The WRC, SARSAS, and the CWJ reported mobilising moral resources to get support from public authorities or personalities. On the other hand, Filia reported moral resources contributing to more participants joining conferences. This could be explained by the fact that WRC, SARSAS, and the CWJ rely on public authorities to pursue their goals, which are more policy oriented. Filia presents a different situation in that regard because its event focus allowed it to develop more independence from public sources.

This can be directly connected to material resources mobilisation, since Filia was able to develop financial independence thanks to its conference. Its need for money, although important, is thus not as acute. In contrast, remaining organisations rely on contract bids to access funding. There are clear differences in the way that funding is leveraged, which can be connected to coalition types. The CWJ did not report any common mechanisms to mobilise funding. On the contrary, enduring coalitions include defined structures for organisations to bid for funding and access it. The WRC is even engaged in reshaping funding distribution mechanisms, reflecting the long-term focus of the collaboration.

VIII. Policy Recommendations

Now that the analysis and discussion chapters have explored interviewees' views of coalition-building, demonstrated how coalitions enables resource mobilisation in various ways, and suggested links between findings and coalition types; the present section answers the remaining sub-question: If viewed positively, what policy changes are necessary to support the development of similar coalition initiatives within the women's sector, or among VAWG charities specifically? And why?

Interviewees emphasised that measures specifically dedicated to supporting coalition-building need to be implemented alongside urgently needed measures generally supporting the women's sector. Currently, most WGOs are just "too busy trying to keep their head above water" to build coalitions, as phrased by Laura from SARSAS. To be efficient, coalition-specific measures must thus be paired with broader support for the women's sector, so that organisations have the capacity to engage meaningfully.

This section begins with measures that indirectly enable coalition-building by strengthening the women's sector as a whole, before turning to those that provide direct support for coalition initiatives.

8.1 Creating the Conditions for Collaboration

There is a pressing need to restructure funding mechanisms in a way that is adapted to the women's sector. This first includes removing WGOs from competitive tendering. The WRC recommends reshaping some of that funding into grants programmes, to substantially reduce the amount of bureaucracy needed and place less strain on organisations' resources. This recommendation is supported by existing literature (Women's Budget Group, 2020). Following a recommendation from Doherty and colleagues (2025), government departments should collaborate with local authorities to provide clear information and remove unfounded concerns that grant-awarding to VCSE organisations would expose local authorities to legal challenges. "This lack of understanding is not a valid reason for blocking grant programmes or for using contracts by default in commissioning" (ibid, p.35).

Several interviewees moreover emphasised that, to adapt to the realities of women's organisations; funding needs to be more long-term, funding applications streamlined, and reporting duties made more flexible. This is reflected in existing literature (Women's Budget Group, 2020; Gill, 2022; Adams et al., 2022). Organisations report lacking the capacity to dedicate staff and time to adequately understand and fill complex applications. They also mentioned that the short-term nature of funding led to difficulties to maintain services and generally challenged the stability of organisations. Adisa and colleagues (2020) highlighted that barriers are even more important for smaller specialist organisations, as their small size further limits their capacity.

For support to reach the entirety of the women's sector, it needs to include measures dedicated to Black and minoritised organisations (Tilki et al., 2015), as mentioned by Daisy and Anna. They face additional discriminatory barriers, which are "perpetuated in the power hierarchies of the voluntary sector and funders" (Manful and Willis, 2024, p.2). As mentioned by Daisy from the WRC, a key solution to that is "ring fencing" funding specifically for those groups, consistently with existing literature (Women's Budget Group, 2020). This must come along with improved data collection on organisational leadership, to ensure that funding does reach organisations led by and for women – and

particularly Black and minoritised women – not just “for women” (Dam et al., 2023, p.63). Existing literature moreover shows that targeted funding contributes to successful partnerships with mainstream organisations, as it “removes competition for limited funds” (Manful and Willis, 2022, p.11).

8.2 Targeted Support for Coalition Development

Align Funding Timelines with Coalition-Building Needs

Looking at measures supporting coalitions specifically, Laura stressed the need to calibrate bidding contracts and support to the realities of coalition-building. She explained that, when a bid is specifically dedicated to coalitions, “that bid is probably due in six-month time [...] You have not got the time to get all that stuff in place, to do all that partnership work”, if, as a single organisation, you wanted to access that funding. She said that there was willingness from “a lot of Commissioners” to promote coalitions, but that “what is underestimated is the time that that takes and the resources that that [partnership-building] takes”.

Bids specific to partnerships should thus take into account the time necessary to form effective, beneficial coalitions. Otherwise, organisations are prevented from accessing funding or risk forming unproductive alliances (Adisa et al., 2020). Adisa and colleagues notably report concerns from VAWG organisations, especially from smaller specialist ones, about being rushed into “inappropriate partnerships in order to be able to apply for a contract that they would not otherwise be able to access and without it, their survival as an organisation may be at risk” (p.42).

Introduce Support for Organisational Resilience

Laura especially emphasised the resources and time needed “to have those difficult conversations at the start” when getting together and trying to develop partnerships, including resolving tensions from having had to compete with each other for funding. Accounts from established literature contend that building a transparent, inclusive culture where all partner organisations feel heard is crucial to building partnerships (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Van Dyke and Amos, 2017). Accordingly, Laura expressed that “Commissioners need to understand that if organisations are gonna work successfully, and they’re gonna work in partnership, there has to be some mechanisms for...to include this kind of work”.

For that, she recommended two options, either additional funding organisations can use for organisation resilience or non-financial support dedicated to that. For the first option, she mentioned that there are some trusts and foundations (e.g. Lloyd) that provide good funding for that, “but statutory organisations...don’t do that”. Alternatively, Laura talked about the option of non-financial support attached to a contract. She mentioned the example of the Cranfield trust included in funding from the Ministry of Justice, saying “when you get their funding, you get with it an access to an organisation that will help you with organisational resilience [...] you can get expertise from that”. Laura also mentioned how, thanks to an award, SARSAS can benefit from similar expertise through GSK’s professional development services. Instead of developing funding, authorities could develop a model in collaboration with such actors to support the development of coalitions. Either way, organisation resilience support “needs to be built into the commissioning process, they can't just expect that organisations can do this stuff”, Laura said.

Knowing that coalitions hold resource optimisation potential, and that money invested in women’s organisations is estimated to generate “five to 11 times” that amount in social value (Women’s Budget Group, 2018, p.4), this appears as a more than judicious investment. The Women’s Budget Group (2020) coherently shows that investing in women voluntary services generates a much higher return than what was invested. Knowing that “without additional funding, women and girls will be turned away from the lifesaving support they need” (Gill, 2022, p.4), financial support for coalition-building and the women’s sector in general is not only judicious but essential and urgent.

IX. Conclusion

This thesis investigated the coalition experiences of VAWG charities in the UK, answering its research question and sub-questions as outlined in this section. Findings suggest that coalitions emerged despite resource scarcity, as charities viewed them as means of surviving a sector-wide economic crisis affecting the women’s sector. Charities’ motivations presented a mix of individual interests to survive and collective aims to support other WGOs or the women’s sector as a whole.

This thesis finds that coalition-building can successfully mobilise all five of types of resources

in various ways, which can be broadly divided between pooling existing resources or generating new ones. Pooling included combining organisations' staff or expertise while creating new resources for example comprised setting up a structure for funding bids or mobilising new people.

Mobilisation techniques varied depending on coalition type and activity. The ad hoc coalition mostly pooled existing resources to achieve a specific goal. Enduring coalitions, by contrast, tended to combine and reshape existing resources to create new ones, aimed at strengthening partnerships over the long-term. The periodic coalition focused on movement-building and targeted women more broadly. This wider orientation enabled it to develop a degree of financial independence and to gear its mobilisation toward creating new resources to support growth. Like enduring coalitions, it had a long-term vision but did not aim to provide as permanent structures.

To promote similar coalition initiatives, interviewees highlighted two targeted recommendations: adapting funding bids to coalition-building timelines and providing support for organisational resilience. However, they also stressed that such targeted measures must be underpinned by broader efforts to improve the financial sustainability of the women's sector, without which organisations are often unable to engage in coalition-building.

Some interviewees mentioned challenges in building coalitions, which sometimes made collaboration impossible. While exploring these challenges was beyond the scope of this thesis, they represent a relevant avenue for future research, and an essential one to support frontline coalition-building. Additionally, future studies could investigate whether the findings of this thesis are replicable across a broader range of coalition experiences and within other VCSE sectors. Addressing these gaps will be essential to better understand how to promote effective coalitions that support charities' vital efforts to combat VAWG.

Appendix

Guiding Questions

- Has your organisation collaborated with other women's organisations in the past, or is it currently doing so?

If yes:

- What motivated your organisation to collaborate?
 - How were these collaborations initiated?
 - What are/were the main goals of these collaborations? To what extent have they been achieved?
- Have external factors (e.g., political climate, public perception, funding restrictions) influenced your willingness or ability to participate in coalitions?
 - Why?
 - Has that evolved in some way?
- How would you characterise your collaboration experience?
 - Why?
 - Does that correspond to the expectations you had?
- What key benefits has your organisation experienced from these collaborations?
 - Would you say those collaborations added value compared to each acting on its own?
 - If so, in what ways?
- What challenges has your organisation faced in these collaborations?
 - How did they emerge?
 - Were you able to mitigate them? How?
- Is your organisation planning to continue or expand its collaboration with other women's organisations?
 - Why or why not?

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