



Changing Culture and Transforming the response to Gender Based Violence in Ireland

Submission to the
National Women's Strategy
2017 - 2020

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1. About SAFE Ireland

SAFE Ireland is a National Social Change Agency working to end gender based violence with a specific focus on male violence against women in intimate/domestic relationships. We believe that at the root of all violence is what happens in the home and that the single biggest barrier to achieving gender equality and human rights for women is the high prevalence of gender based violence and its wider personal, family, social and economic impacts. We are working to make Ireland the safest country in the world for women and children. We collaborate closely with 39 frontline domestic violence services across communities in Ireland, state agencies, civic society organisations, business, community, and cultural organisations throughout the country. We work directly with women to bring their experiences and voices into research, policy, service development and violence prevention programmes. Our core strategic focus is to change culture and transform the response to gender based violence in Ireland in order to progress our vision for a safe Ireland.

2. Introduction

Violence against women and girls is the worst form of discrimination and one of the driving factors for gender inequality in Ireland. While the National Women's Strategy will focus on a wide range of important issues relating to women and girls in Ireland, we have prepared this submission to focus specifically on aspects of male violence against women in Ireland and in particular domestic violence. SAFE Ireland is a member of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) and we are also supportive of the recommendations submitted by the NWCI in relation to the wider issues affecting to women and girls in Ireland.

In this submission we will outline the case for violence against women to be prioritised as a visible and explicit high level objective in the National Women's Strategy. We will also set out some key actions and outcomes in relation to addressing male violence against women to be included in the National Women's Strategy which we believe will complement and enhance the implementation of the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence and strengthen Ireland's pathway to compliance with the Istanbul convention. This evidence based submission draws on both qualitative and quantitative research conducted in Ireland in the past 4 years.

SAFE Ireland welcomes this opportunity to input into the development of this important national strategy for women and we are willing to participate in any further advisory or consultative processes that can assist both the development and implementation of the Strategy.

3. Achieving Women's Full Potential

“an Ireland where all women enjoy equality with men and can achieve their full potential while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life”

We very much welcome the Government's vision as set out in the consultation document. As SAFE Ireland is working to make Ireland safe for women and girls there is a clear synergy between our vision for a safe Ireland and the Government's vision for a safe and equal Ireland for women.

Key to achieving equality for women is addressing the widespread prevalence and impacts of gender based violence which act as a barrier to the 'enjoyment of a safe and fulfilling life'. We believe that addressing gender based violence needs to be a high level and visible priority in the Government's new National Women's Strategy in order to strengthen the progress that Ireland can make to realise a vision for a safe and equal Ireland for women.

While the consultation paper includes violence against women as an action area under the proposed high level objective to improve women's and girl's physical and mental health, we believe that there should be a high level objective to **change culture and transform the response to male violence against women**. In addition, an understanding of the impacts and prevalence of male violence against women should also inform all other actions in the strategy. Our opinion is also in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goal¹ to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls through the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres.

The following section details some of the prevalence and impacts of male violence against women in Ireland.

Prevalence of Gender Based Violence in Intimate Relationships in Ireland

Gender based violence is one of the most pervasive but least recognised abuses of human rights globally. In Ireland, it is estimated from recent research² that **1 in 3 women** have experienced psychological violence from a partner at some point in their lives and **1 in 4** have experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner or non-partner since the age of 15. The only national administrative data relating to domestic violence in Ireland has been published by SAFE Ireland annually since 2008. While this is a limited data set the most recent data³ is presented in the graphic below.

¹ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

² In 2012 the EU Fundamental Rights Agency conducted 1,500 face to face interviews with women in Ireland from a national stratified sample, as part of a European wide study on Violence Against Women. The sample size in ratio to the Irish population allows us to extrapolate this data to ascertain some indication of recent prevalence. See European Union Fundamental Rights Agency, Violence Against Women: AN EU-Wide Survey, 2014, available at http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf.

³ Both the SAFE Ireland National Domestic Violence Service Statistics Report 2015 and the SAFE Ireland National One Day Count of Women Accessing Domestic Violence Services 2015 are yet to be published.



In the most recent published national statistics report from the RCNI⁴ in 2015, 11 RCC's around the country responded to 13,208 helpline contacts and 1,384 people accessed counselling and support services. Also in 2015, the Dublin Rape Crisis centre⁵ which operates the national free phone helpline responded to 11,789 helpline contacts and provided counselling to 499 people.

Widespread impact of Gender Based Violence in Intimate Relationships in Ireland

Domestic violence and violence against women negatively impacts on all facets of a woman's life; her physical and mental health, her socioeconomic status, her participation in education, work and leadership. We know that any form of abuse and violence has negative effects on the brain, mind, body, social systems and society. A vast body of research has unequivocally established the impacts of intimate partner violence and sexual assault on women's physical and mental health and well-being.⁶

Impact on Health and Well Being

Women and girls experiencing violence utilise health services more frequently, including emergency departments, outpatient care, primary care services, counselling services, and are more likely to report worse health status than those who do not experience violence.⁷ The lasting effects of psychological, physical and sexual trauma can cause chronic physical problems throughout life. Experiencing trauma or witnessing trauma are associated with a significant unadjusted risk for cardio vascular disease, arteriosclerosis or hypertension, gastrointestinal (GI) disease, diabetes, arthritis, and obesity. Abused women are twice as likely to experience chronic physical health conditions. Women who have been abused spend 42% more on health care.⁸ While research on the impact of violence on women's health has been well established, there has been insufficient attention to other social and economic consequences. In other words the full costs

⁴ Rape Crisis Network Ireland – Data from 11 of the 16 Rape Crisis Centres in Ireland in 2015. <http://www.rcni.ie/wp-content/uploads/RCNI-RCC-StatsAR-2015.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.drcc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/DRCC2015-Final-Version-HR.pdf>

⁶ Garcia-Moreno and Watts, 2000; Duvvury, et al., 2001; Bacchus, et al., 2004; Campbell et al, 2008; Duvvury, et al., 2012; WHO, 2013).

⁷ (Bonomi et al., 2006

⁸ APA, 2011; NPIPC, 2003; SWHR, 2013

(including health, social and economic costs) for women, families, communities and society largely remain invisible.

Poverty

Research has found an inextricable link between Domestic Violence and Poverty. Significant numbers of low-income women experience domestic violence, and the violence they experience can make the journey out of poverty impossible. Poverty, in turn, makes it more difficult to end domestic violence and heal from its effects. When women leave violent relationships they may walk into poverty and homelessness for the first time in their lives.

Homelessness

Domestic Violence directly results in homelessness for women and children. In 2015, 1,471 women and 2,093 children stayed in a domestic violence refuge because they had no accommodation that could keep them safe from further violence. Domestic violence is simply not on the homeless agenda. It is not being dealt with or addressed within the current housing crisis. According to local authority practice, women leaving violent homes are not being considered homeless; they are seen as being out of home, as they have a home, albeit an unsafe, violent one. Consequently, they are being further neglected and rendered invisible in the current housing responses. Spiraling rents and the complete lack of social housing stock and rental properties mean that women cannot find places to live with their children. As a consequence, women are staying in emergency refuge for months. Service managers are referring to refuges as becoming more like “homeless hostels”. The knock-on impact means that other women looking for emergency accommodation to escape violence cannot actually access refuge. There simply is not enough room. Ireland's provision of emergency accommodation remains less than one third of that recommended by the Council of Europe.

Leadership

Gender based violence is often a barrier to women progressing in leadership roles. The EU FRA study⁹ found that 23% of women in Ireland experienced controlling behaviour by a partner. Furthermore, **1 in 5** women (19%) had experienced some form of sexual harassment in the immediate 12 months prior to being interviewed, rising to **1 in 2** women experiencing some form of sexual harassment since they were 15. The long term psychological consequences for women who experienced some form of sexual harassment include loss of self confidence (20%), feeling vulnerable (29%), anxiety (18%) and depression (8%). The US National Democratic Institute has begun research into violence against women in political life, we are not aware of any such research in Ireland, however in the previous administration there were three published incidents relating to offensive sexist and abusive behaviour¹⁰.

⁹ <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/survey-data-explorer-violence-against-women-survey>

¹⁰ <http://www.thejournal.ie/mick-wallace-labels-mary-mitchell-oconnor-miss-piggy-175763-Jul2011/>,
<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/irishnews/article4734018.ece>
<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/td-barry-apologises-for-pulling-collins-onto-lap-1.1460330>

Workplace

Gender based violence also effects workplace performance and career advancement. As an example, a pan-Canadian survey¹¹ of 8,429 people exploring the impacts of domestic violence in the workplace found that more than a third of respondents reported experiencing DV; among them, more than a third reported that DV affected their ability to get to work, and more than half reported that it continued at or near work. Most reported that DV negatively affected their performance. Almost all respondents, regardless of DV experience, believed that it impacts victims' work lives. Active participation in work or education for women experiencing domestic violence is often impeded by their partners controlling behaviour as well as the stress and other trauma impacts from the violence.

The EU FRA study mentioned previously also found that for 26% of women who had experienced sexual harassment since they were 15, that **1 in 4** of the perpetrators was someone in an employment context and 63% were male.

Conclusion

Male violence against women is highly prevalent in Ireland and has far reaching consequences which impedes the lives of victims and their families, limiting women's potential and opportunities to realise a safe and fulfilling life.

Until gender based violence is eradicated, women and girls will never enjoy equality with men or achieve their full potential while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life. However, without progressing women's equality we cannot prevent violence. These issues must be addressed symbiotically and explicitly. Neither gender equality nor violence prevention can be realized in isolation of each other. Therefore, we recommend that preventing and responding to gender based violence is placed as a high-level objective in the strategy.

Recommendation

The prevention and elimination of gender based violence should be included as a high-level objective in the National Women's Strategy. We suggest that this high-level objective be worded as follows: **Change culture and transform the response to male violence against women**. In addition, an understanding of the impacts and prevalence of male violence against women should also inform all other actions in the strategy.

¹¹ Wathen, C. N., MacGregor, J. C. D., & MacQuarrie, B. J. (2015). The Impact of Domestic Violence in the Workplace: Results From a Pan-Canadian Survey. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 57(7), e65–e71. <http://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000000499>

4. Changing culture – Attitudes and Behaviours

“to change attitudes and practices preventing women’s and girls’ full participation in education, employment and public life, at all levels”

We cannot achieve equality for women and girls in Ireland without addressing gender stereotyping, sexism and misogyny. These attitudes and behaviours result in and/or facilitate an environment for the prevalence, impact and poor response to male violence against women. The National Women’s Strategy needs to name sexist and misogynistic attitudes and behaviours and include actions to both measure the extent of these along with programmes to reduce their prevalence across various settings like the work place, the courtroom, the boardroom, the local pub, news reporting, the college campus or in the locker room etc.

Addressing harmful gender norms throughout the lifecycle is very important as the intersection between gender based violence and stereotypes of male dominance/female inferiority can influence child development and respect between girls and boys from a very early age. In addition, these early interventions can also break the cycle of ‘normalised violence, gender roles and disrespect’ which children may grow up in particularly where their family, social and educational environments would be subjected to strong patriarchal, violence and/or misogynistic influencers and messaging.

Addressing unconscious/hidden biases across all state and non-state services is key to changing culture and responding effectively and equitably to the needs of women seeking protection and supports from violence.

The extent of these harmful/hindering attitudes and beliefs in Ireland need to be measured as a baseline for the ongoing evaluation of the impact of the actions implemented under the NWS in reducing/changing these belief systems. Such periodic measurements would also provide an indicator of Ireland’s success in progressing towards an equal society for women and men as well as highlighting areas for policy and programme development.

Early intervention in education programmes which promote diverse gender, ethnic, religious and family types as well as respect and an understanding of healthy and safe relationships are really important in preventing gender based violence and also in achieving equality for all.

In a special Eurobarometer study on gender based violence, there were concerning levels of attitudes relating to justification of sex without consent (21% of respondents), beliefs that domestic violence was acceptable (8%) and that it should be treated as a ‘Private Matter’ within the family (12%). Attitudes that blamed female victims for the violence they experienced were also of concern with 18% of respondents believing that the victim provoked the violence.

In line with WHO recommendations¹² for promoting gender equality to prevent violence against women there is a need to engage men and boys to actively speak out and

¹² World Health Organisation. (2009). *Promoting gender equality to prevent violence against women*. Available at: http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/gender.pdf

challenge harmful gender norms and practices. The SAFE Ireland Man Up campaign has begun to address masculine stereotypes while also encouraging men to speak out and respond to violence against women.

The Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence 2016 - 2021 also aims to change societal attitudes to support a reduction in domestic and sexual violence and under that aim the recent national awareness campaign 'What Would You Do?' was launched. This development demonstrates the Government's commitment to prioritising this issue. It's focus on bystander intervention is a necessary step, we would like to see this campaign developed further and strengthened with input from all relevant stakeholders. We also believe that there should be further government campaigns to address negative gender stereotypes and to challenge offensive sexist and hateful attitudes to women and men.

The representation of women in the Irish media needs to be addressed in order to help change Irish culture and negative attitudes and beliefs about women. This includes the reporting of crimes against women and in particular the minimisation of these crimes, the invisibility of the women and the sympathy that often gets promoted towards the male offenders.

Actions to be included in the National Women's Strategy

- Remove references in the constitution that prioritises women's domestic role over work outside the home (Article 41.2 of the Constitution)
- Develop initiatives to address gender norms, dating violence and sexual abuse among teenagers and young adults before gender stereotypes become deeply ingrained. The WHO briefing doc¹³ has examples of programmes that have been effective including Safe Dates programme in the United States and the Youth Relationship Project in Canada.
- Target and work with male peer groups, where rigid ideas about masculinity can be questioned and redefined.
- Further develop the ManUp Campaign and other awareness programmes which seeks to engage men and boys in standing against gender based violence.
- Further develop the 'What Would You Do?' campaign, with ongoing consultation with stakeholders and experts in the area.
- Develop guidelines and national standards for media reporting to address negative gender stereotyping and everyday sexism and misogyny in the media.
- Resource the delivery of 'Unconscious/Hidden Bias, gender diversity and diversity training for all staff in the public and civil service as well as resourcing similar training for non-state services and civil society organisations.

¹³ World Health Organisation. (2009). *Promoting gender equality to prevent violence against women*. Available at: http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/gender.pdf

5. Transforming the whole system response

The system responding to domestic violence is so fragmented, with little cross departmental collaboration or communication that women are simply falling through the cracks and domestic violence falls off the agenda. More than ever there is a need for joined up thinking and mutual respect and commitment of all stakeholders to radically improve our country's response to the protection of victims and the prevention of further violence.

While there are small pockets of good practice there is a prevalent culture of minimising the violence, blaming the women and misunderstanding the dynamics of Domestic Violence and the agenda of the perpetrator to use the state systems to further control and abuse the woman.

Underreporting is a significant problem in Ireland with only 21% of women¹⁴ contacting the police within a year of experiencing severe physical or sexual violence by a partner. Reporting this violence to all other services ranges from 24% reporting to health services to 4% to social services. When women do seek support, their needs are not being met. 1 in 4 women reported that when they did seek support, they did not get the protection from further victimisation/ harassment that they needed, 1 in 4 women did not receive the practical support they needed and 62% did not have their need for moral support met.

Cuts to resources within the domestic violence sector have had detrimental impacts, with services experiencing cuts of up 38% since the beginning of the recession, pushing them to brink of closure. While there has been an increase in resources to Tusla in the last 2 budgets, at the very minimum the 2008 levels of funding need to be restored to domestic violence and rape crisis national and local organisations in Ireland.

In 2015 there were 4,796 unmet requests for emergency accommodation¹⁵, women and children were turned away from refuges because there simply was no space. Due to the housing crisis, there is a shortage of suitable move on housing options for women staying in refuge. Refuge is designed to be used as emergency accommodation but in recent times women have been forced to stay long term.

Since 2014, SAFE Ireland has conducted a series of mixed method research studies on women's experiences of the Irish Legal System in search of legal remedies and protection from domestic violence¹⁶. Our research has heard directly from 63 women, examined 50 women's case files and included the perspectives of DV frontline staff, justice professionals, social workers and Gardaí. The legal system - at every level - is failing women and children who are living with violence and abuse in their homes. There is complete inconsistency in the responses domestic violence victims receive from the legal

¹⁴ see European Union Fundamental Rights Agency, Violence Against Women: AN EU-Wide Survey, 2014, available at http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf.

¹⁵ SAFE Ireland National Domestic Violence Service Statistics Report 2015 is yet to be published.

¹⁶ SAFE Ireland. (2015) *The Lawlessness of the Home*. Athlone: SAFE Ireland. Available at: <http://www.safeireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/SAFE-IRELAND-The-Lawlessness-of-the-Home.pdf>

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system. While there are pockets of good practice, where legislation and policy is being implemented, this has been the exception rather than the norm.

The pillars of best practice in protection of victims from domestic violence emerged as entirely absent from the Irish context.

- Absence of individual needs and risk assessment
- Absence of judicial training and justice sector training
- Absence of inter and multi-agency coordination
- Absence of monitoring and data collection
- Absence of legal definition of domestic violence in Irish legislation.

The Domestic Violence Act order process is long, formidable and costly, and the rate of attrition high. Many of the key concerns noted by both practitioners and women¹⁷ who have experienced DV are around high thresholds for DVA orders and legal aid. Fear of authority, limited supports and information gaps also mean that women who are eligible for DVA orders and legal aid are not accessing them. Untrained individuals are providing protection on the basis of a non-existing definition without any assessment of individual risk, without monitoring. This is undoubtedly contributing to the low levels of reporting and high levels of withdrawals of complaints.

Under current Irish law women who are in or were in a dating relationship with the perpetrator, including women in non-cohabiting relationships, who have not had a child together; and women who experience DV from some family members are ineligible for DVA orders.

The increase in Legal Aid fee from €50 to €130 and the long waiting lists have disastrous implications for women, with many women experiencing domestic violence simply not being able to afford the fee or waiting months for a solicitor. Other issues arising in relation to Legal Aid include some women not qualifying for legal aid because of assets which may be in joint names but that she may not be able to control use.

Actions to be included in the National Women's Strategy

Full implementation of the Istanbul Convention and the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence to include the following:

Cross Department Infrastructure

- All relevant Government departments and agencies should develop a 5-year strategic and operational plan to establish a strong infrastructure to enable a transformation of the response to gender based violence. These plans should be costed and reviewed by the Department of Public Expenditure with a minimum of a 5-year commitment to incremental investment to achieve a state of the art approach to responding to and preventing gender based violence in Ireland. This is not currently reflected in the National Strategy on DSGBV.

Law Reform

¹⁷ SAFE Ireland research on the effectiveness of domestic violence orders for women with specific needs is due to be published in 2017

- Agree a broad definition of Domestic Violence, including psychological as well as physical violence, and incorporating by way of examples of psychological violence, both coercive control and acts of economic violence.
- Explore the possibility of creating a specific criminal offence of domestic violence
- It is vital that any training developed for Gardaí, lawyers, Courts Service staff, Judges ensures that the following topics are covered:
 - Dynamics of domestic violence;
 - Its impacts, especially the impact of trauma on the ability of victims to understand and retain important information (at every stage);
 - The importance of clear and accessible communication with victims
 - The importance especially for lawyers and judges, of not compounding trauma for women by insensitive, prolonged and opaque questioning techniques
 - The nature of specific needs: there is no one classification resulting in the woman being sorted into one well-defined static population group e.g. Traveller, Roma, blind person etc., rather specific needs should be regarded as individual and unique combinations (and so on)
 - An understanding Unconscious gender bias and how to avoid acting on it
 - The importance of timely and appropriate referrals to specialist supports
 - The importance of effective inter-agency working

Resources

- Develop a National Plan for Service delivery to ensure that there is equitable access across populations and communities meeting the needs of all victims/survivors of gender based violence
- Allocate an additional €30 million annually (from 2018) to the national plan for service delivery as well as resourcing the Gardaí, courts services, housing and social protection services to begin to address the gaps in service responses to victims/survivors and to allow for piloting of innovative solutions. This increased budget allocation should also resource NGO's and other agents to carry out prevention initiatives to help reduce the prevalence of gender based violence.
- Increase the emergency accommodation capacity of domestic violence services by 10% or by 14 family units every year for the next five years.

Data collection

- Resource and enable frontline domestic violence services to collect service related data while protecting the privacy of the service users
- A universal identifier system for DV related criminal cases should be developed for use in all relevant agencies, and to feed into CSO statistics;
- This identifier system should be capable of distinguishing all possible assault, harassment, false imprisonment, sexual violence, coercion offences, and
- Should be capable of generating extra sub-identifiers if a new crime with a DV background is added (e.g. criminal damage to a woman's car or phone line)

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