Assessing the Social and Economic Costs of DV

A Summary Report

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<td>Abusive Relationship</td>
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July 2021
Acknowledgements

This report has been authored by Dr Caroline Forde and Dr Nata Duvvury, Centre for Global Women’s Studies, NUI Galway. Our sincere gratitude to the 50 women who participated in this research for generously sharing their experiences with us. Special thanks also to Safe Ireland staff for their valuable input, and to the member organisations for facilitating the research.

This research has been supported by funding from the Community Foundation for Ireland. However, the views expressed, and information contained in the report, are not necessarily those of, or endorsed by, the Community Foundation for Ireland.

Quotes and stories

Throughout this document you will read a selection of quotes and stories from our in-depth interviews with the women who participated in this research. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms are used.
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About Safe Ireland

Safe Ireland is the leading social change agency in Ireland working on the issue of Coercive Control and Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. As advocates and experts, we collaborate with our 38 members who are domestic abuse services throughout Ireland, 20 of whom also provide refuge. Our work is to change social behaviour and attitudes, establish a whole system response to sex and gender-based domestic abuse/coercive control, cultivate leadership, communicate our understanding of the problem, and enhance capacity to prevent and respond. We do this through research, informing public policy, increasing capacity - through our frontline services, through public awareness and primary prevention.

We lead research and disseminate good practice to our members, other professionals and statutory bodies. We collate the experience of our member services and give them and survivors a voice, sharing their experiences and the enormity of domestic violence, within our country. We work in collaboration with our members, government departments, state agencies and relevant stakeholders to progress our change agenda. We want society to take responsibility for the eradication of violence against women and children, to change the culture that enables it.

For more information about this position paper contact:

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Domestic violence is a serious and complex social problem that continues unabated worldwide. To date, a robust evidence base has established its most visible consequences for individuals, families and communities. However, less is known about the wider social and economic costs of domestic violence.

To address the gap in knowledge, this research sought to determine the social and economic costs of domestic violence in the Republic of Ireland. In-depth interviews were conducted with 50 women across the country to estimate indicative direct and indirect costs, including costs of accessing services and foregone income/productivity. The research was carried out between July 2017 and May 2018.

Not all women experienced all costs

It is important to note that not all of the women specifically reported all of the abuse issues discussed, nor did they report costs across all of the cost categories (this does not mean, however, that they did not experience them). The indicative costs are calculated based on those who did experience particular key abuse issues and related costs.

Indicative view of costs

This research is the first to assess the indicative social and economic costs of domestic violence. The findings provide an understanding of the overall economic costs of domestic violence for women. The findings also contribute to the international evidence base, reinforcing and expanding our understanding of domestic violence impacts. They do not, however, take into account costs to the State, including the cost of DV service provision. One of our key recommendations is that this research is continued with a macro-estimation of domestic violence costs in Ireland using a broad range of prevalence sources, records and studies.

By extending the breadth of enquiry to include ongoing abuse and longer-term costs, the findings in this research span three distinct phases, which are referred to as:

**Phase One:** Abusive Relationship
Spanning on average 15 Years

**Phase Two:** Sanctuary and Interim Period
Spanning on average 1.5 Years

**Phase Three:** Relocation and Recovery
Spanning on average 4 Years

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1. The researchers have calculated lost income in this work based on the woman’s salary. It is named throughout the document as lost income/productivity as the woman also loses productivity when she cannot work. Income and productivity are interrelated, calculated using different metrics, which will require further research.
Key Themes Explored

A number of key themes or common areas of experience for the participants emerged from the qualitative element of this research:

- Emotional abuse as core to what we know and understand about coercive control.
- Ongoing abuse, sometimes referred to as separation abuse – domestic violence/coercive control, and its associated costs after a woman has left the abuser.
- Lost income/productivity – identified as the largest economic cost.
- Access to stable housing, as a significant problem for women.
- Help-seeking activity – the range of statutory and specialist services accessed by a woman multiple times.

Establishing the Evidence Base

This research is the first crucial step in producing an evidence base for policy makers, service providers, and advocates to provide adequate resources in response to coercive control, thereby translating policy commitments into concrete action. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has not caused domestic violence, it has exposed it, with lockdowns exacerbating an existing problem or facilitating the development of violence. The findings of this research make an important contribution to this changing landscape by providing the preliminary costing evidence required to inform the first national Audit of DSGBV and the Tusla Accommodation Review, and to support the development of the third DSGBV Strategy, which will meet our Istanbul Convention commitments. This evidence will also support the required expansion to meet the extraordinary threats and opportunities which the global pandemic has created.

Findings in brief

Aggregate cost of domestic violence over a woman’s journey to safety

€113,475 per woman

€5,673,732 for 50 women in this study.

National estimated cost of DV over a woman’s journey (average 20.5 years from this study)

€56 BILLION
Key Findings

This research gives an indication of the scale of social and economic costs of domestic violence. It finds that:

> The aggregate indicative cost of domestic violence across the three phases of a woman’s journey from abuse and entrapment to safety and freedom is €113,475 per woman or a total of €5,673,732 across the 50 women in this study.

> This equates to a national indicative estimate cost of €56 billion over the three phases examined (20.5 years on average), based on the most comprehensive study of the prevalence of domestic violence/coercive control. While the cumulative cost of DV is a more important measure of the “lifetime” cost of DV, it is worth considering that this equates to an estimated cost of at least €2.7 billion each year (this does not include the cost of service provision).

> There was an almost equal level of costs in two of the three phases – the costs of the Abusive Relationship phase and the Relocation and Recovery phase.

> Lost income/productivity emerged as the major cost for women, equivalent to €2,466,129 in total for 12 women in the research or €205,511 for each woman who experienced income loss on average over the three phases. In addition, women faced key challenges with regard to housing and homelessness, particularly in the Relocation and Recovery phase.

“So, I already felt isolated, that the places that we’d been living in out in the countryside .... then this became like the prison. So, in this place there was lots of times, you could even go a week without even stepping outside the front door...It was just living in this, like, a warzone. I don’t know how else to say it but you’re imprisoned within it.”

Letitia
Introduction

Domestic violence in intimate relationships involves sex and gender-based patterns of often violent coercive control, predominantly, but not exclusively, manifested as male violence against women and girls. Child abuse is an integral part of this abusive complex.

The current study involves domestic violence, encompassing intimate partner violence perpetrated against women and the co-occurrence of child abuse within the household. In this report, we focus on the experiences and costs related to intimate partner violence.

Coercive Control

Stark’s (2007) conceptualisation of coercive control is foundational to our understanding of domestic violence in intimate relationships. According to Stark, coercive control involves varying combinations and degrees of violence, intimidation, isolation and control. Perpetrators employ several tactics, such as structural forms of deprivation, exploitation, monopolisation of vital resources and regulatory regimes.

International research has established that violent coercion in intimate relationships (including emotional abuse and controlling behaviours) is one of the most common forms of violence against women. For example, 30% of ever-partnered women report some form of physical and/or sexual abuse by an intimate partner over their lifetime. While national prevalence data are lacking in Ireland, a 2014 EU study and national domestic violence support services data highlight the serious and pervasive nature of domestic violence in our society.

A large body of research documents the impacts of domestic violence on women’s physical and mental health, as well as the effects on children (now recognised as direct victims in these cases), the family, the workplace and society in general. Violence in intimate relationships is a direct and indirect risk factor for a variety of health problems frequently seen in healthcare settings. Building on this evidence base, studies estimating the broader social and economic costs of domestic violence are gaining momentum.

References

7 See for eg. WHO (2013) at ii.
Substantial Costs

The cost of domestic violence/coercive control both for individuals and families, as well as for the national economy, is substantial. Direct costs include expenses for services to treat and support abused women, their children, and to bring perpetrators to justice. The indirect costs include lost employment and productivity, which undermines women's capabilities. Recent research in Vietnam indicated that the costs of accessing services, missed work and lowered productivity amounted in aggregate to 3.12 per cent of GDP.\(^9\)

The evidence base on social and economic costs of domestic violence in Ireland is underdeveloped. An oft-cited figure for economic costs is based on a 2006 European study.\(^10\) Alternatively, researchers recommend extrapolating costs from 2012 UK costs.\(^11\) This strategy is not appropriate for several significant reasons such as the incomparability of the UK and Irish historical and cultural contexts (see forthcoming full report for further details).

Moreover, there continues to be little systematic recording of violence cases in Ireland by institutional service providers such as the police, courts and health facilities. In addition, a comprehensive understanding of help-seeking behaviour is lacking. Though the economic situation has also undergone significant change in the last two years, austerity related cutbacks to funding for domestic violence services continue to hamper the levels of resources committed to addressing violence.

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10 Irish Examiner (2008). “Domestic violence costs the country €2.2bn”.
To counter the ongoing negative impact of austerity measures and ensure sufficient budgetary allocations to tackle the epidemic levels of domestic violence, policymakers need to attend to its costs.

This understanding can also inform the first national Audit of DSGBV infrastructures; supplement the Tusla Accommodation Review; and support the development and implementation of the third DSGBV strategy. It can also inform policymakers about how the costs of domestic violence:

1) affect the overall economy, and;

2) potentially impact economic growth, which is crucial to sustaining recovery.

As the first domestic violence costing study conducted in Ireland, the current research establishes a firm foundation by estimating a range of direct and indirect costs, and examining women’s help-seeking pathways. The research is exploratory in nature, enabling the participants to share their stories in an open and relaxed manner.

Participants

Fifty women (see Appendix 1) who have experienced domestic violence participated in in-depth interviews in 13 counties across the Republic of Ireland. Flexible and sensitive, this method puts women’s experiences front and centre, ensuring the collection of substantive data.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure diversity. The key stratifying variables for domestic violence services comprised size, rural and urban coverage, and range of support services. The key stratifying variables for participants consisted of age, ethnicity, geographical location, type of domestic violence experienced and duration accessing a domestic violence service.

Forty-eight of the women were recruited through a Safe Ireland frontline member service, and two women through a Traveller support service. All of the women had been accessing/had accessed the DV/Traveller support service for at least two weeks. None were in immediate crisis.

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Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The in-depth interviews enabled quantitative and qualitative data to be gathered about the following key areas:

- Experience(s) and impact of domestic violence;
- Help-seeking pathways;
- Recovery process.

An accounting framework was employed to estimate direct and indirect costs. From the women’s stories, individual costs were derived, and these underpin the estimation of average costs. By outlining the spectrum of small to significant costs for different women, a more complete picture could be produced.

The exploration of women’s help-seeking pathways also enabled us to identify the specific channels of help that most women seek, the frequency with which they seek help and the costs associated with help-seeking. The following sections present the central research findings.

“Some days you’d be pissed off, but sure look, you just have to... you just have to keep going, you know. Within the day... I’m doing the little stepping stones as they say. It doesn’t matter how slow you’re moving once you’re moving in the right direction. Always one day. I pray in the morning. I pray in the evening... and I read light stuff... and I walk away from the negativity. Know who to stay away from. I’m aware... so, yeah, I’m just tipping, doing my best.”

Sarah

Social and Economic Costs

Framework

The profound and complex trauma of domestic violence/coercive control has long-lasting impacts. Its multifarious social and economic costs are thus substantial and often invisible.

The costs of DSGBV are not bound by one specific period; they span three distinct phases (see Figure 1 below):

- **Phase One: Abusive Relationship**
  The Abusive Relationship phase is frequently marked by women’s lack of financial control. They either have no independent income or are responsible for all financial burdens, with the decision-making commandeered by the perpetrator.

- **Phase Two: Sanctuary and Interim Period**
  Women in the Sanctuary and Interim Period are dealing with the challenges associated with escaping an abusive relationship, such as securing housing, exacerbated by their invisibility within mainstream homelessness provisions, and by financial illiteracy. Lack of accommodation is a major issue, with the threat of homelessness presenting a significant deterrent for women wishing to enter this phase.

- **Phase Three: Relocation and Recovery**
  The Relocation and Recovery phase involves ongoing physical, emotional and/or financial difficulties, which are oftentimes exacerbated for lone parents. These difficulties include barriers to accessing social protection and sourcing stable housing.

  The themes that were explored in the research represent the women’s common areas of experience across the key phases. The myriad psychological and physical impacts of domestic violence cut across all three phases and these social costs translate into economic costs such as lost income/productivity. As women’s journeys are both complex and unique, help-seeking can occur in any, or all, of the phases. With regard to service use, services in the domestic violence, healthcare, legal, criminal justice and judicial sectors were most commonly accessed by women. The primary entry point for support was through healthcare services.

Figure 1: Key Phases and Key Themes Explored
Phase One: Abusive Relationship

Table 1: Economic Costs Summary: Abusive Relationship

In this phase, of the 50 women interviewed, 40 experienced aggregate costs as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>€ Healthcare</th>
<th>€ Legal</th>
<th>€ Lost Income/ Productivity</th>
<th>€ Expenses</th>
<th>€ Debt</th>
<th>€ Loss</th>
<th>€ Total</th>
<th>€ Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>83,705</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,780,707</td>
<td>654,440</td>
<td>309,510</td>
<td>45,275</td>
<td>2,873,637</td>
<td>71,841</td>
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</table>

Economic Costs

Women incurred multiple expenses during the Abusive Relationship across several categories. Table 1 above provides a summary of cumulative costs in each category and the overall average cost per woman. The services accessed and costed in this phase are healthcare and legal; lost productivity refers to lost earnings and lost output; expenses to living costs such as rent, mortgage and bills; debt to money owed; and loss to the repair/replacement of broken items or stolen money (by the perpetrator).

Forty women (80%) in our sample reported a total financial cost of €2,873,637 over the span of the Abusive Relationship.

This amounts to €71,841 per woman on average over the duration of the abusive relationships, which was approximately 15 years.

No legal fees were reported for this phase, as these costs were incurred by the participants in the Sanctuary and Interim Period, and Relocation and Recovery phases.

“Ok it would be in the back of my mind, but I would keep going. It was harder alright; it was more difficult to work but genuinely I can say that I gave it my all still. … I would have said [about the domestic violence] especially with people that I’m working with, you can’t work if you can’t. But it did keep me focused. I had something out of that house.”

Sheila

Exploring Some Key Themes in More Detail

1. Service Use/Healthcare

The majority of these participants (52%) spent varying amounts of money on their healthcare needs. The average amount spent per woman on a variety of services such as GP visits, hospital stays and marriage counselling, as well as medication for depression and/or anxiety, was €3,219. Most women continued to incur financial costs due to domestic violence after this initial phase.
2. Lost Income/Productivity

The financial impact of domestic violence on women’s income/productivity, in the form of lost earnings and lost output, emerged as a significant category within this phase.

Eleven participants (22%) sustained a total financial cost of €1,780,707, the largest overall cost in this phase. Many of these women were prevented from working, forced to work part-time or to take sick leave, while others became ill, stressed or lost self-confidence due to the abuse. Some ultimately ceased economic engagement.

**Thirty cents was a fortune for me**

“I don’t have money, never money, zero. I can’t go out. Imagine like. In the last year, he give me, like if it’s milk, it’s €1.20 to buy the milk and one day he give me €1.50 because he didn’t have change so I kept 30 cents. Thirty cents was a fortune for me! The next time we needed milk, he gave like less than €1. He said ‘you have the money’. I remember I cried. Even when I was small, before I finished my studies, when I started work … I always had money. With him, if I said I wanted something, ‘no’.”

Lina

Unpaid work, ill-health and lost opportunities – the cost of domestic violence

For Emily and Magda, financial abuse involved working for their ex-husbands without receiving a wage. Both Emily and Charlotte believe their health problems, and inability to continue working, could have been exacerbated by the abuse they experienced. Emily’s injury led to several major surgeries and now she can no longer work.

Leah lost her business. She had to close it down after many successful years because of the abuse she experienced. Karen lost her job. Others who continued to work, found it a constant struggle. Some, including Sheila, had to miss work due to their injuries.

3. Coercive Control

Forty women (80%) were subjected to abusive behaviour on a regular basis, predominantly over a twenty-year period. Emotional abuse was the most common form of coercive control reported. Indeed, all of the study’s interviewees were subjected to emotional abuse (see Appendix 2). However, owing to its insidious nature, women found it difficult to identify.

Isolation, another common tactic of coercive control, was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Women who had come from another country to Ireland were particularly vulnerable to isolation. Manipulation and threats featured heavily in women’s accounts.

Thirty-eight (76%) women reported financial abuse. In many cases, the woman’s ex-partner had complete control of the finances in the relationship, leading the woman into dependency.

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16 Occurring in 99% of relationships - 4 women had two abusive relationships.
Phase Two: Sanctuary and Interim Period

Table 2: Economic Costs Summary: Sanctuary and Interim Period

In this phase, of the 50 women interviewed, 27 experienced aggregate costs as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>€ Healthcare</th>
<th>€ Legal</th>
<th>€ Lost Income/ Productivity</th>
<th>€ Expenses</th>
<th>€ Debt</th>
<th>€ Loss</th>
<th>€ Total</th>
<th>€ Average</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>7,826</td>
<td>11,075</td>
<td>211,870</td>
<td>147,081</td>
<td>154,752</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>536,604</td>
<td>19,874</td>
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</table>

In this section, we present the findings from women who sought/were seeking sanctuary in a domestic violence refuge or with family/friends, as well as those who had begun the process of extricating themselves from the abusive relationship, yet are still living with the perpetrator.

These latter participants were effectively biding their time, as their current circumstances prevented them from escaping. At the time of interview participation, 18 women (36%) had accessed a domestic violence refuge. Ten were still living in a domestic violence refuge or with family/friends. Some were looking forward to moving into a new home within a matter of weeks, but others reported finding it difficult to secure a house, particularly because of membership of the Traveller Community.

Economic Costs

Table 2 presents the cumulative costs associated with what is often the first step in escaping an abusive relationship.

Out of our sample, 27 women (54%) reported a total cost of €536,604 for the Sanctuary and Interim Period. This equates to €19,874 per woman on average over the approximately one and a half years of this phase.

Living expenses, such as bills and everyday needs, was the most common cost category, with 23 women (46%) women reporting an average cost for this of €6,395 over the phase.

Given the impact of financial control in abusive relationships, the everyday costs of living can be overwhelming for women experiencing DSGBV and can further contribute to their entrapment.
Exploring Some Key Themes in More Detail

1. Lost Income/Productivity

Productivity again emerged as a substantial cost during this phase, in the form of lost income. It was estimated to be €42,374 on average across five women who could not work at all or could only work part-time due to domestic violence. Reasons disclosed included illness and an inability to rely on an ex-partner to take care of their children.

2. Service Use

In addition, 18 participants (36%) spent approximately €18,901 cumulatively on help-seeking (eg. health, legal) during this phase, with legal fees incurred as the major cost.

3. Housing

Housing emerged as a significant issue in this phase. As noted above, some women have stayed in a domestic violence refuge and others have stayed with family and/or friends, for varying lengths of time, ranging from a few nights to several months. Some of these women discussed the various challenges they have faced, such as losing their ‘own space’.

The ongoing national housing crisis exacerbates the vulnerability of victims in this context, where their vulnerable status is not formally recognised.

“Like it was never back to the relationship; it was only back to a roof over my head .... when we were there at any stage we [the girls and myself] were living in the bedroom before I ever left because of the abuse.”

Barbara

The Housing Trap

Hilda described her financial situation as being ‘stuck in limbo’, while Megan felt ‘trapped’ in her home. As the house was in both her and her ex-partner’s name, Hilda was ineligible for social protection or the social housing list. Barbara sought to rent a house after she escaped from her abusive ex-partner but the only house she found was too expensive and far away from her children’s school. She instead stayed in a refuge in a different county (due to lack of space) for five months and then with her sister for two weeks. She next began renting a house, which was 35km away from the children’s school, so she had to return to the family home, as she could not afford the ‘upkeep and the travelling expenses’.

“Like it was never back to the relationship; it was only back to a roof over my head .... when we were there at any stage we [the girls and myself] were living in the bedroom before I ever left because of the abuse.”

Barbara
Phase Three: Relocation and Recovery

Table 3: Economic Costs Summary: Relocation and Recovery Period

In this phase, of the 50 women interviewed, 39 experienced aggregate costs as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>€ Healthcare</th>
<th>€ Legal</th>
<th>€ Lost Income/ Productivity</th>
<th>€ Expenses</th>
<th>€ Debt</th>
<th>€ Loss</th>
<th>€ Total</th>
<th>€ Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>26,941</td>
<td>158,437</td>
<td>473,552</td>
<td>948,965</td>
<td>524,604</td>
<td>130,993</td>
<td>2,263,491</td>
<td>58,038</td>
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</table>

Economic Costs

Each of the women characterised the recovery process as a journey, with many of them speaking about progress in terms of safety, peace, freedom, strength and having a ‘much better life’. A small number of women also discussed returning to work or looking for work. However, all the participants also discussed the tumultuous nature of adjusting to their new lives.

The profound trauma and hurt many of the respondents continued to feel was either explicitly discussed or palpable throughout the interviews. Some women lamented the common misconception that once a survivor escapes, ‘it’s all over and everything is fine’.

It is clear that post-separation coercive control remains a personal and structural issue.

Table 3 presents the cumulative financial costs involved in beginning anew, many of which are ongoing. Out of our sample, 39 women (78%) reported a total cost of €2,263,491 for this third phase - Relocation and Recovery - which spans on average four years. This equates to €58,038 per woman on average.
Exploring Some Key Themes in More Detail

1. Lost Income/Productivity

In this phase, eight women incurred a total of €473,552 in lost income because they were unable to work for various reasons, or were only able to work part-time or were seeking work.

2. Living expenses

Living expenses emerged as the most frequently reported expenditure totalling €948,965 for 37 women (74%). When Sarah’s ex-partner left, he took the family car and ‘all the money’. Several women discussed how, once they had paid for the necessities, they were left with little to no money at the end of each week. Though Lena also reported struggling, her financial situation had improved since her ex-partner left as he became legally liable for half of all their shared expenses.

3. Housing

Housing was a dominant theme in this phase (but not costed in this study). For example, both Karen and Lucy were deemed homeless, with Lucy expressing her disbelief at how easily this could happen to her. Some women also reported fearing they would lose their homes, while both Kim and Tracey reported having had no option but to live in damp houses. Kim and her three children had to share one bedroom for two years to save electricity, while Ruth and Tracey discussed the difficulty of getting landlords/ the council to address structural problems in their houses. The invisibility of DSGBV victims in housing policy remains a problem.

4. Ongoing/Separation Abuse

The majority of women also discussed the perpetrator’s ongoing attempts to exercise control. Financial abuse emerged as the most common tactic in terms of unpaid child maintenance or using child maintenance payments to exert control (insufficient amount or paid late to ensure the woman would struggle).

While most women escaped the abusive relationship or managed to get their ex-partner to leave, some abusers remained in the home. A small number of perpetrators left women for a new partner. Many women continued to be in some form of contact with their ex-partners because of separation/divorce proceedings, access and/or child maintenance.

Some women further reported that their ex-partners were manipulating their children or using the legal system to harass them, or coercively triangulating through tactics such as solicitor’s letters or court summons concerning access and custody. Where possible, several perpetrators were continuing their abusive behaviour directly. Many of these men had broken the conditions of their Domestic Violence Orders. Actual and virtual stalking was also employed by several men.

“Actually, for the women out there- they will just think that, yeah, it is easy; you walk out. That’s one step. But the result of that they haven’t seen it, how you cope in the house on your own, how you cope with the bills, how you cope physically. If the children are sick, you can’t be all the time healthy yourself to look after other people, to look after these human beings, you know, to the best of your ability, having to work in the house on your own.”

Kim
At the time of the interviews, the total economic impact for the women in this sample across all cost categories was €5,673,732, a unit cost of €113,475 (the total economic cost divided by the total number of women in the sample: 50).\(^{17}\)

This equates to a national estimate of €56 billion over the three phases or approximately 20.5 years, based on the most comprehensive prevalence study.\(^{18}\) Notwithstanding the bounded nature of this research, it indicates that domestic violence in Ireland costs at least €2.7 billion every year (this does not include the cost of service provision or housing). Table 4 details the overall cumulative costs across all three phases.

**Table 4: Overall Economic Costs**

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<th>€</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>118,472</td>
<td>169,512</td>
<td>2,466,129</td>
<td>472,086</td>
<td>507,562</td>
<td>7,660,468</td>
<td>5,673,732</td>
<td>113,475</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although costs to the State were not calculated in this study, the costs of providing services and housing, for example, are substantial. This shows us that it is women and the State who bear the brunt of the costs of domestic abuse and coercive control.

This research showed that many women were unable to recognise/name their experiences as domestic violence, particularly when it was psychological/emotional in nature. Many experienced shame and the prevalent belief that ‘children need a father’ influenced some women to endure and ‘stay quiet’.

However, once they decided to seek help, women generally accessed a variety of services on multiple occasions over the three phases, captured in this snapshot of the overall indicative costs of domestic violence.
Focus on Lost Income/Productivity

Productivity in the form of lost income was the highest cost category across all three phases. As can be seen from Table 5 below, twice as many women in our sample were unemployed at the time of the interview than were at the beginning of the abusive relationship. Most of these women had been driven into unemployment because of illness/injury and trauma due to domestic violence or because the perpetrator prevented them from working, thus stalling their careers. Some women, who were not originally working, had to begin part-time or full-time work, in the absence of accessible childcare, which was proving particularly difficult for lone parents.

Based on the experiences of 12 women who had lost income/productivity across all three phases, the total cost or loss was €2,466,129. Individually, this equates to €205,511 for each of them, or about 43% of the total cost of domestic violence across all three phases.

Table 5: Employment Status - Outset of Relationship and Currently

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Outset of Relationship</th>
<th>Currently</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>30% (15)</td>
<td>62% (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time employment</td>
<td>10% (5)</td>
<td>20% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time employment</td>
<td>58% (30)</td>
<td>14% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4% (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

The findings of this report confirm existing international evidence that coercive control and domestic violence is a costly and pervasive social problem.

Theses findings also build upon the scant evidence on the economic costs of domestic violence, as well as providing significant insights into its wider social impact. They enable a deeper understanding of women’s help-seeking patterns, as well as the ongoing nature of both the abuse and its social and economic repercussions for women and by implication, children, in their own right.

1. Significant Economic Costs

The trauma of domestic violence translates into significant economic costs for women, and it is evident that these costs continue well after the ‘end’ of the abusive relationship. The current research expands our knowledge by providing data on the indicative financial costs survivors incur across three distinct phases. The aggregate indicative cost of domestic violence across the three phases of a woman’s journey from abuse and entrapment to safety and freedom is €113,475 per woman or a total of €5,673,732 across the 50 women in this study.

This equates to a national indicative estimate cost of €56 billion over the three phases examined (20.5 years on average), based on the most comprehensive study of the prevalence of coercive control and domestic abuse – or an estimate cost of at least €2.7 billion each year.

2. Cause and Effect of Poverty

The relationship between poverty and domestic violence and coercive control is complex and circular, acting as both a cause and effect. When women are in, leave, or are recovering from, an abusive relationship, as is clear from this report, they will face an increasing and real threat of poverty, especially where financial control has been a core element of their abuse. However, it is also the case that many women do not leave abusive relationships because of the threat of poverty and stigma. This hidden domestic violence/coercive control poverty threat/trap needs close scrutiny and further research.

3. Intensive Use of Services

Among the various costs reported, health costs were the most widely incurred, not only during the Abusive Relationship but also during the subsequent phase of Recovery and Relocation. In keeping with findings of other European costing studies, the current research verifies that women also incur significant legal costs, mainly in the Recovery and Relocation Phase.

In addition to establishing the economic and social costs of domestic violence, the findings provide important insights into women’s help-seeking pathways. Most women accessed either informal support from family/friends or formal support from a domestic violence or healthcare service during the Abusive Relationship, or at the outset of their Relocation and Recovery process.

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19 It is important to note that even when women do not seek help, they incur invisible economic costs. The various social and economic costs of domestic violence lead to significant costs for the economy (Scriver et al 2013).

20 Based on the unit cost per woman applied to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Right’s (2014) lifetime prevalence of psychological violence – coercive control - (31%) for women since age 15, and the 2016 Census population estimate of women aged 18 to 74.

21 See for eg, Council of Europe (2014) at vi.
4. Lost Income/Productivity

Though health costs were the most widely incurred, women reported that lost income/productivity due to missed work and inability to participate in the labour market was the major cost to them. This reflects international research establishing the substantial toll of domestic violence on women’s employment. Lost income/productivity hinders women’s future employment and career progression, and leads to long-term consequences for their economic security, particularly in the Recovery and Relocation Phase.

Quality employment mitigates poverty, while providing financial independence and a greater capacity to escape an abusive relationship. In the current study, the number of women unemployed had doubled since the outset of the abusive relationship, predominantly due to domestic violence. The findings suggest there is a need for supports at the place of employment including a domestic violence leave policy to reduce the probability of women ceasing economic engagement.

5. The Housing Challenge

Echoing existing research, a number of women became homeless as a result of domestic violence. The availability of safe, affordable and stable housing is fundamental not only to a woman’s ability to escape an abusive partner, but also to remain safe and independent. The National Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness provides policy and procedural guidance for housing authorities on their role in assisting survivors of domestic violence. However, given the ongoing national housing crisis, individuals placed on the social housing list must wait an inordinate amount of time to be housed.

“Our journey supported by domestic violence services, public awareness, and education”

Laura


According to Safe Ireland, women and their children are being forced to stay in domestic violence refuges for longer periods of time because of the lack of available accommodation in the community. This negatively impacts the refuges’ ability to take in further families seeking safety. With only 21 refuges in the entire country, Ireland provides just 31% of the minimum recommended in the Istanbul Convention. Between September and December 2020 alone, 808 requests for refuge could not be met, due to lack of space.

There has also been an increase in families registered as homeless with their local authority, transitioning from a refuge to a B&B or a hostel. For some women, the fear of their children becoming homeless has forced them to remain in extremely abusive situations. Mirroring issues previously highlighted, our findings further indicate the problematic nature of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme. The payment is generally inadequate and many landlords are unwilling to accept it. Safe Ireland members actively advocated for the establishment of a DV Emergency Rent Supplement in 2020. The Department of Social Protection and Tusla have since established a rent supplement for victims of domestic violence and Tusla has committed to conducting a review of domestic violence emergency accommodation provision in the Cavan-Monaghan area.

There is no escape from abuse without a safe home. In the US, where there is also a dearth of affordable housing, the Housing First framework recognises that once an individual secures a stable home, addressing their co-occurring issues is easier. Adapting this model to domestic violence in Ireland has potential. The provision of safe housing, in conjunction with wraparound trauma informed services, would ensure that survivors’ trauma is addressed and affordable housing is available.

6. Recognising Coercive Control

Reflecting the findings from Ireland in a recent study, emotional abuse was the most frequently reported form of domestic violence in the current research. Its often subtle and insidious nature lends itself to invisibility, which enables the perpetrator to sever their partner’s social connectedness and place them in an extremely vulnerable position within the relationship. The recent criminalisation of coercive control (Domestic Violence Act 2018) is an important milestone in this regard.

7. Ongoing Abuse

A common societal misconception about domestic violence is that once the survivor ends/escapes the abusive relationship, the violence ceases and there are no further consequences. However, detaching from an intimate coercive relationship means dealing with the various ties that bind people to each other. Gaining freedom from these complex layers of entanglement takes time and support.

Women are often most at risk of serious harm or of being murdered after escaping an abusive relationship. The current findings provide important insights into the ongoing abuse women are subjected to, whereby perpetrators continue to seek control by any means available, even when they have ended the relationship. Ex-partners predominantly maintain financial control by paying little to no child maintenance, even when mandated by the court.

This report identifies estimated costs (excluding service provision and housing) to women, and to the state, of failing to address the full impact of domestic violence/coercive control on our society. It is hoped this research will trigger further attention an appropriate response.
Here are the five key recommendations emerging from this study:

1. **Inform Critical Strategic Thinking**
   The findings of this research make an important contribution to this changing landscape by providing the preliminary costing evidence required to inform the first national Audit of DSGBV and the Tusla Accommodation Review, and to support the development of the third DSGBV Strategy, which will meet our Istanbul Convention commitments. This evidence will also support the required expansion to meet the extraordinary threats and opportunities which the global pandemic has created. While Ireland must meet the commitments of the Istanbul Convention, Covid19 exposed domestic violence/coercive control for what it is - a pandemic. It provided innovative, flexible responses at community level which point the way forward in erasing DSGBV.

2. **More In-depth Research**
   Further research is needed to identify individual, family, community and state costs. This would include a macro-estimation of domestic violence costs in Ireland utilising police records, NGO records or prevalence studies, such as the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights national survey; estimation of productivity loss for businesses in the form of absenteeism and presenteeism for survivors and perpetrators; and full evaluation of the cost of unpaid or under-paid care work. This is in addition to a much-needed national prevalence study, as well as sex and gender-based analyses to provide insights into how structural inequalities, gender norms, expectations and entitlements model and drive abuse in intimate partner relationships.

3. **Address Work, Income/Productivity Loss**
   Legislation to provide for paid work leave to address domestic violence should be introduced as a matter of urgency, with a complementary awareness programme for survivors and employers.

4. **Housing Led Response**
   While this study did not cost housing, it became clear that this is a reason why many women stay in or return to abusive relationships. In relation to domestic violence, a “Housing-Led” model is proposed as a positive strategy to address the chronic shortage of social housing and affordable rental accommodation:
   1. Consider adaptation of the US Housing-Led Model to the Irish context, and;
   2. Prioritise access to social housing for domestic violence survivors and their children.

5. **Government Leadership and National Services Delivery Plan**
   In keeping with *No Going Back*, the Safe Ireland discussion paper on a new national strategy infrastructure for DSGBV, the findings in this report support the calls for:
   1. A dedicated Minister and Ministry for DSGBV
   2. Policy and services in the same central Government location
   3. A National Services Development Plan
   4. Urgent Prevention Strategy
## Appendix 1: Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>26-37</th>
<th>38-49</th>
<th>50+</th>
<th>2-3</th>
<th>&gt;3</th>
<th>&lt; Level 7</th>
<th>&gt; Level 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>28% (14)</td>
<td>50% (25)</td>
<td>22% (11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Children</td>
<td></td>
<td>58% (29)</td>
<td>42% (21)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>58% (29)</td>
<td>42% (21)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Duration of Abusive Relationship(s)*</th>
<th>No. of Abusive Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Settled Irish</td>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>2% (1) One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>18% (9) Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Traveller</td>
<td>6-12 years</td>
<td>26% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>13-20 years</td>
<td>24% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>&gt;20 years</td>
<td>28% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>1) 1-5 years; 2) 13-20 years</td>
<td>2% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Types of Coercive Control Experienced by Participants

- Emotional: 100%
- Verbal: 90%
- Financial: 76%
- Physical: 80%
- Sexual: 30%
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