

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AN ISSUE OF GENDER

*Highlighting the role
of gender in analysis
and response*

Irish Observatory on
Violence against Women

December 2013

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Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence – yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

About the Observatory

The Irish Observatory on Violence against Women operates under the auspices of National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) since its formation as part of an EU Daphne initiative in 2002. The Observatory is an independent network of grassroots and national organisations that come together quarterly to monitor progress on violence against women in Ireland and it provides an important space for organisations working on violence against women to share priorities and influence Government policy.

The Irish Observatory links with and has representation on the European Observatory on Violence against Women which is co-ordinated by the European Women's Lobby, (EWL). The European Observatory's main objectives are to identify critical and emerging issues in order to support the work of the EWL in advocating for the prevention of all forms of violence against women, for improved policies and for much needed improved service provision to women victims of male violence. The European Observatory raises visibility of the phenomenon of male violence against women and monitors commitments at local, regional, national and European level regarding violence against women, highlighting advances and setbacks, as well as providing relevant data. It comprises of 33 experts (one from each of the 27 Member States and one from each of the 6 accession/neighbouring countries), nominated at national level.

Members of the National Observatory are, Akidwa, Cork Sexual Violence Centre, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, European Women's Lobby through the Irish Representative on the European Observatory, Immigrant Council of Ireland, National Women's Council of Ireland, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, Ruhama and Women's Aid.

The Irish Observatory has produced two national reports. They are:

- Prevalence of Violence against Women in Ireland, 2004.
- The Second National Report of the Irish Observatory on Violence against Women Pornography, 2006¹.

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1. Introduction: What is Violence Against Women?

Violence against women or gender based violence is a very complex, widespread issue and constitutes one of the most serious forms of violation of women's human rights in Ireland today.

In 2002, the Council of Europe² adopted a definition of violence against women and in particular domestic violence, similar to that used in the United Nations Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women³ in 1993.

Violence against Women is defined as follows:-

...."any act of gender-based violence, which results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

This includes,... violence occurring in the family or domestic unit, ...physical and mental aggression, emotional and psychological abuse, rape and sexual abuse, incest, rape between spouses, regular or occasional partners and cohabitants, crimes committed in the name of honour, female genital and sexual mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, such as forced marriages".

The Council of Europe Convention on Violence Against Women (Istanbul Convention⁴ 2011) emphasises the gender perspective on violence and states that violence against women cannot be addressed without looking at gender equality issues. Domestic violence is highlighted as affecting women disproportionately. The Istanbul Convention frames the eradication of violence against women in the context of achieving equality for women and recognises

the structural nature of violence, which is both a cause and a consequence of unequal power relations which limits the advancement of women.

Why Gender?

Sexual and domestic violence is a cause and consequence of gender discrimination and it needs to be located within a gender equality framework. There is a misconception among government agencies that gender equality means that women-only services cannot be provided or that anything provided for women must also be made available for men. This undermines the specialist services needed for women who are victims of violence. Gender refers to women's and men's social roles and behaviour that are socially and culturally constructed. By being aware of how gender creates different roles for women and men, and by taking account of unequal power relations between women and men, service providers will be able to address different vulnerabilities experienced by different groups of women and men. The purpose of this publication is to highlight the issue of gender in responding to and analysing violence against women.

2. What are the different forms of Violence Against Women?

Violence against women occurs in multiple forms. Among the main ones are:-

(i) Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is where one person tries to control and assert power over their partner in an intimate relationship. It can be physical, emotional, financial or sexual abuse. These often overlap. Any woman can be affected and it can happen in any home. 25% of all violent crimes reported involve a man assaulting his wife or partner⁵.

The main types of abuse perpetrated against women experiencing domestic violence are

- **Physical abuse;** This is perhaps the most recognisable form of abuse. It can result in physical injury, and in some cases it can be life threatening or fatal. Examples of this type of abuse are when women are punched, slapped, stabbed, beaten and raped, and even thrown down stairs while pregnant⁶.
- **Emotional abuse;** This is a means of establishing a power imbalance within a relationship and can be as harmful as physical violence. It often involves threats of physical or sexual abuse, being put down, constantly criticised, controlled and monitored.
- **Financial abuse** is a form of domestic violence in which the abuser uses money as a means of controlling his partner. It is designed to isolate a woman into a state of complete financial dependence. It includes controlling the family finances and not being allowed to have independent income. It can also involve

destruction of property including passport or other important documents.

- **Sexual Violence** occurs where there is a dynamic of control and abuse in an intimate relationship. It is difficult for women who are being abused by their partner to negotiate a free and equal sexual relationship with that partner. Women experience being repeatedly raped and beaten, being told that it is their duty to have sex with their partner and being raped in front of the children. Sexual degradation also includes the enforced use of graphic and hardcore pornography.

(ii) Rape and Sexual Assault

Rape or sexual assault occur if a woman is forced to participate in a sexual act without her consent. This may take the form of threats, coercion, or physical violence. Rape and sexual assault are particularly distressing crimes for the victim and the effects can last for a long time. Women who have been raped are severely traumatised and in most cases suffer from acute stress, anxiety and intense emotions. In fact, rape and sexual assault are among the most common causes of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in women⁷. In addition to psychological harm resulting from the act, rape may cause physical injury, or have additional effects on the victim, such as acquiring a sexually transmitted infection or becoming pregnant.

Myths and misconceptions about sexual assault and rape contribute to the fear which women experience causing them to hesitate in reporting attacks. Often they feel stigmatised⁸, can find the intimate facts of

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the experience difficult to talk about, are afraid they will not be believed or will be blamed for provoking the attack. Often, incidences of rape are treated as taboo and are shrouded in silence. Rape is considered to be the most underreported violent crime and research at European level indicates that only between 2% and 10% of rapes are reported to the authorities⁹.

Rape can also occur between two people who know each other. 'Date rape' or intimate partner rape may occur in relationships that have an existing pattern of violence. In 2011, there were 28,615 helpline contacts to Rape Crisis services, a 10% increase on 2010. The statistics for that year also show that where sexual assaults took place, 90% of perpetrators were known to the survivor¹⁰.

While women, men and children can be victims of rape and sexual assault, the perpetrators are predominantly men¹¹. There are clear differences in female and male vulnerability to sexual violence. Where male vulnerability to sexual violence decreases as they age, female vulnerability does not decrease to the same extent¹².

One in five women and one in ten men have experienced sexual assault in adulthood¹³.

Rape is a physical violation of the individual and research shows that the motivation in rape and sexual assault is not the meeting of sexual needs necessarily but the need for power, control and domination¹⁴. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that one of the principal factors that lead to the perpetration of sexual violence, including rape, is a belief in ideologies of male sexual entitlement¹⁵.

(iii) Prostitution and Trafficking

Involvement in prostitution is rarely a freely-entered choice for a woman. Most women

involved in prostitution have backgrounds of poverty, abuse and low self-esteem which limit a woman's capacity to identify alternative income generation opportunities. As well as the physical harm caused by prostitution with mortality rates as much as twelve times the national average^{15a}, there is emotional and psychological harm which is the result of being sexually objectified. Being in prostitution erodes self-esteem and self-confidence and is a serious cause of depression. Women in prostitution experience terrifying and degrading treatment and extremely high levels of violence such as beatings, rape and sexual assault. They face constant subjection to humiliations of all kinds as well as the serious health risks from very frequent, rough sex and at times the requirement to have unprotected sex.

Prostitution, and the social and cultural attitudes which sustain it, are deeply rooted in gender inequality and social marginalisation. As well as the harm to each individual, there is the social and cultural impact – the damage to the social position and perception of women both nationally and globally, the proliferation of sex tourism and trafficking and the normalisation of all forms of violence against women. The sexual exploitation of prostitution is harmful to all women. If one woman is perceived as being for sale, the implication is that all women and girls are potentially for sale.

Women and children are exploited in Ireland's sex industry which has a conservatively estimated annual value of 180 million euros¹⁶. On average, 1000 women are available for sale on any given day and the vast majority of them are migrant women and girls. The strong link between prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation has been well documented¹⁷.

Human trafficking is the trade of people as commodities for various purposes including forced labour, trafficking for begging, criminal activities and sex slavery. Trafficking is a

contemporary form of slavery with a distinctly gendered bias. Women are most likely to be used for prostitution, domestic labour and forced marriages, (www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat). Most victims of trafficking are women, (www.unodc.org) from impoverished backgrounds who are sometimes abducted, but more usually duped into exploitation. It is not necessary to cross a border to be trafficked. In Ireland women seeking asylum who are trapped in poverty in asylum reception centres are also susceptible to prostitution¹⁸. In addition, poor and marginalised migrant women are vulnerable to recruitment by prostitution organisers, lured by promises of lucrative contracts here. The 200 women supported through casework in Ruhama during 2011 came from 36 different countries¹⁹.

“There is a link between prostitution and trafficking. The European Commission recognises this.”²⁰ – Myria Vasiliadou

(iv) Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) involves the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia of a girl for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons. It is common practice in at least 28 countries, in Africa, Middle East and Asia. FGM is considered an act of violence against women and children because it can cause irreparable harm to female genitalia and reproductive organs. A huge number of women die needlessly throughout the world both as a direct result of FGM, and from related infections and complications. FGM leaves psychological and emotional scars too. Up to 140 million girls and women around the world have undergone genital mutilation, (www.globalpovertyproject.com). It is widely documented that women can suffer from post traumatic stress disorder as a

result of FGM which can result in traumatic flashbacks to the event²¹. It is estimated that 3,780 women living in Ireland have undergone FGM although the actual number may be higher²². The Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 2012 has made it a criminal offence for someone in Ireland to perform Female Genital Mutilation

(v) Forced Marriage

A number of instances have occurred in recent years in Ireland of marriages where the authorities suspect there may not have been consent to marriage. In 2007 the National Garda Immigration Bureau stated that Gardai were investigating a number of cases of forced marriage involving migrant children as young as 12. There are very few remedies available to a person forced into marriage under Irish law. Another more clandestine form of abuse appears in the so called sham marriages, whereby vulnerable women who are EU citizens, are offered money to enter into fake marital arrangements with a male migrant. In some cases women have found themselves deceived and subject to sexual and other forms of abuse by ‘agents’ and/or prospective ‘spouses’²³.

(vi) Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment occurs when unwanted conduct has the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person. It can take the form of actions, gestures, spoken or written words, pictures etc. It can involve text messages, email, phone calls or other electronic or social media communication. Sexual harassment can also include offering preferential treatment in exchange for sexual favours.

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Harassment directed against women, reinforces the subordination of women to men in society, violates women's dignity and creates a health and safety hazard.

Critical to efforts to combat sexual harassment has been the growing recognition of sexual harassment as a form of violence against women which violates women's human rights. A 2005 report by the International Labour Organization²⁴ indicates that sexual harassment is more prevalent against women who are more vulnerable, such as young women, separated, widowed or divorced women, women employed in "non-traditional" or male-dominated professions, women working in informal sectors of the economy, or migrant workers. 16.2% of women experienced some form of sexual harassment at least once during the last 12 months. Being stalked in a way that was frightening to them was reported by 1 per cent of the participants in the 2002 SAVI study in Ireland²⁵.

Although the above forms of violence are listed separately, they are interlinked and they are all expressions of control and abuse of power over women. The same men often perpetrate more than one form and many women are subjected to multiple types of violence.

DID YOU KNOW?

- One in seven women experiences domestic violence in Ireland²⁶.
- Domestic violence can affect any woman at some stage in their lives regardless of race, class, age, religion, sexuality, ability, income, lifestyle or location²⁷.
- One in five women and one in ten men have experienced sexual assault in adulthood²⁸.
- In 2012, there were 14,792 incidents of domestic violence disclosed to the Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline²⁹.
- 42% of women in Ireland reported some form of sexual abuse or violence over their lifetime³⁰.
- In 2011, there were 28,615 helpline contacts to Rape Crisis services, a 10% increase on 2010³¹.
- In 2011 Ruhama supported 241 women affected by prostitution; 200 in casework and 41 exclusively through street outreach, representing an increase of 18% on 2010³².
- Of the 557 clients seen by Dublin Rape Crisis Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy in 2012, 88% of them were women³³.
- Contacts from women to the 24 hour Dublin Rape Crisis Centre National Helpline comprised 83% of total calls in 2012³⁴.
- On one day 6th November 2012, 537 women were accommodated and/or received support from a domestic violence service in Ireland. 21 women could not be accommodated because of inadequate space for refugees³⁵.
- For women aged 15-44 worldwide, acts of violence cause more death and disability than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, and war combined³⁶.
- Since 1996, there have been 194 women murdered in the Republic of Ireland. 119 women (61%) were killed in their own homes. In the 142 cases where perpetrators have been noted, 75 women (53%) were killed by their partner or ex-partner³⁷.
- Between 40 and 50 per cent of women in European Union countries experience unwanted sexual advancements, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at their workplace³⁸.
- There are only 136 refuge places in the Republic of Ireland. The Council of Europe recommend one refuge service to every 10,000 people³⁹. This would require an additional 322 places for the Republic of Ireland.

3. Understanding Violence against Women

There are no simple explanations. Research indicates that the roots of violence against women lie in the **unequal power relations between men and women**.

Following thirty years of testimony, activism and research by the global women's movement the UN declared:

"Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to the domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of their full advancement, and that violence against women is one of the crucial mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position with men"⁴⁰.

UNICEF also highlights the multiple aspects of power inequality underlying violence against women and refers to social and cultural factors which have "kept women particularly vulnerable to the violence directed at them". These factors include socio-economic status, family institutions where power lies with men, need to control female sexuality and legal and cultural sanctions which believe in the inherent superiority of males⁴¹. In Ireland, for example, it was considered legal for a man to rape his wife up to 1990⁴². Laws change but it can take generations for attitudes and behaviour to follow suit. In the two decades since 1990, there has only been one marital rape conviction. Traditionally men have had little or no social or legal sanctions for their violence⁴³.

Violence against women needs to be understood in a wider social context which permits the perpetrator to assume the right to use violence as a means of exercising dominance. Therefore, the key components

of the dynamics of violence against women are the concepts of gender and power. As a social group, men have greater power and status than women, and abuse and violence is an important way by which men seek to maintain their dominant position.

While violence may be aggravated by alcoholism, despite widespread misconception it is neither caused by substance abuse nor mental health problems. Violence against women may increase in times of recession but unemployment and poverty are not the root causes of this violence. The essential purpose of violence is to gain and maintain power and control of another person.

An analysis which ignores the disproportionate experience of women and violence, results in a lack of appropriate targeting of personnel and resources. The issue needs to be looked at from both the perspective of women AND men. Taking a gender neutral approach, that is assuming the same for everyone, can cause disadvantage to men, women and society in general. If women experience violence disproportionately and are at more risk, then the allocation of state resources needs to reflect this.

4. Are Men at Risk too?

Men experience significant amounts of violence in Irish society but while they do experience rape, sexual assault, domestic abuse, prostitution and other forms of violence discussed in this document, they experience abuse differently to women. Far fewer men than women experience domestic abuse and the pattern of victimisation is different for men and women, with women being considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of violence. There is little in the way of Irish data but a Scottish study in 2004 showed that 32% of women who had ever experienced domestic violence did so four to five (or more) times, this compared with 11% of men. The same study showed that women constituted 89% of all those who had experienced four or more incidents of domestic violence⁴⁴.

Therefore, the pattern and impact of violence is different for men and women, violence is used in different ways, with violence by men more likely to involve fear and control of the victim⁴⁵. Statistically, men are less likely to fear for their safety, less likely to be seriously injured, and are more likely to have financial independence. Where men are subjected to violence at the hands of women, usually the violence is not as prolonged, or as extreme⁴⁶. Tragically, for Irish women, extremely violent domestic incidents result very often in murder. For example, the statistics on female homicide show that since 1996 there have been 194 women murdered in the Republic of Ireland. 117 women (61%) were killed in their own homes and 99% of the perpetrators were male⁴⁷.

Women are twice as likely as men to be injured as a result of domestic abuse⁴⁸.

5. What is the cost of Violence Against Women?

Violence against women has serious costs and consequences not just for the individual woman but for the community and society as a whole. The effects of violence have larger ranging social costs that cannot be measured. These include the fear all women may face as a result of knowing that other women suffer from gender based violence, the undermining of societal values and the guilt non-violent men feel for the actions of the perpetrators⁴⁹.

Studies of the prevalence of violence against women world-wide indicate that violence is an issue that permeates every corner of society, is widespread and costly.

Violence leads to serious health damage, physically and emotionally. Apart from physical injuries, it causes fear, distress and loss of self-confidence. It damages autonomy and prevents those affected from feeling free and safe. Compared with non abused women, women who suffer violence are more likely to experience serious medical and mental health problems⁵⁰. Violence during pregnancy is a significant risk factor for low birth weight, infections and anaemia. Injuries to children, emotionally and physically, are not unusual in families where there is violence. The prevalence of violence and of sexually transmissible diseases including HIV/AIDS are interlinked. Women's inability to negotiate safe sex and refuse unwanted sex is closely linked to the contraction of these serious infections⁵¹.

Violence does not only have an important personal, health and social cost, but also an **economic** cost. Violence against women prevents an economy from attaining its full economic potential⁵². One way to organize the economic costs of violence is to place them in categories based on the

consequences of violence and the services utilised as a result of violence. Costs can be found in a number of categories: Justice, Health, Social Services, Education, Business Costs, Personal and Household Costs. A UK study in 2008 found that almost STG£16 billion is the total cost of domestic violence to their economy⁵³ per annum. The estimated cost of domestic violence to the Irish economy is €2.2 billion a year. This is based on a Council of Europe figure which states that domestic violence costs each member state €555 per citizen annually in policing, health bills, lost productivity and court procedures⁵⁴.

6. What are the barriers to women getting help?

Violence against women is often a hidden crime and much of it goes unreported. Some factors have been shown to make women less likely to seek help from voluntary organisations, medical professionals or the Gardai.

Nine factors that stop women getting help;

1. In cases of sexual and domestic violence, **self-blame and guilt** is often experienced by the woman. The woman may agonise over what it was she did to provoke the attack, regardless of the fact that it was not her **fault**.
2. **Fear** on the part of the woman that she will not be believed.
3. **The lack of effective sanctions** for men who have perpetrated violence is a deterrent for women reporting this crime.
4. Crimes of sexual and domestic violence are often tolerated, minimized or dismissed by society. Perpetrators know this so any social or **legal sanctions are not effective or dissuasive**.
5. A woman experiencing violence **may not recognise it as a crime** against her⁵⁵.
6. Migrant women with dependent residency status are afraid to report abusive partners **out of fear of losing their legal rights**. A woman may become destitute or homeless or may fear deportation or other sanctions on the part of the State⁵⁶.
7. By **controlling the woman's access to financial resources and property** the abuser ensures that she will be forced to choose between further abuse or facing extreme poverty.
8. **Emotional manipulation** causes a woman to experience shame, embarrassment and hopelessness in abusive relationships, which causes her to feel disempowered.
9. **Discrimination and racism** experienced by women from minority ethnic groups including Traveller and Roma women has resulted in some mistrust of authority and reluctance to disclose and seek support⁵⁷.

7. How can women find help?

AkiDwA

Tel. 00 353 (0)1 8349851
www.akidwa.ie

Cork Sexual Violence Centre

Tel 1800 496 496
www.sexualviolence.ie/

COSC – the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, Department of Justice and Equality

Tel: 00 353 (0) 1 4768680
www.cosc.ie

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

National 24 Hour Helpline for Rape Crisis
Centres 1800 77 88 88
www.drcc.ie

Immigrant Council of Ireland

Information +353 (01) 674 0200
www.immigrantcouncil.ie

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre

Tel. +353 (01) 8780255
www.paveepoint.ie/

Rape Crisis Network Ireland

Tel. +353 (0) 91 563 676
www.rcni.ie

Ruhamma

Tel. + 353 (01) 836 0292
www.ruhamma.ie

Safe Ireland

Tel. +353 (090) 6479078
www.safeireland.ie

Women's Aid

Domestic Violence National Freephone
Helpline - 1800 341 900
www.womensaid.ie

Women's Health Project

Baggot Street Clinic
Tel : +353 1 6699515
E-mail: admin.whp@hse.ie

8. What can be done to combat Violence Against Women?

Recommendations to the Irish Government

That the Irish government sign and ratify the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence*, and in doing so adopt a gender sensitive approach to the issue.

This includes:-

- **Funding**
Recognise and support the role of NGOs and civil society. Increase funding by 10% to organisations providing front-line services and supports to survivors of violence against women to offset budget cuts in recent years and increase funding to advocacy organisations working at a representative, policy and support level.
- **Support Services**
Provide adequate support services, including helplines, counselling and safe, emergency accommodation for women experiencing violence. A target of at least 1 refuge place per 10,000 of population should be agreed and resources ring fenced to make progress towards that target.
- **Data Collection**
Collect national data and support research to expand knowledge base and support policy development. Allocate resources to fund a SAVI 2 Report in relation to the nature and extent of sexual abuse and violence in Ireland and research into the economic cost of domestic and sexual violence in Ireland. Accurate and comparable data and statistics are needed at national and international levels in order to assess impact of programmes and prevalence of the issue. Clear data disaggregated by gender and ethnicity is essential.
- **Legislation**
Amend Domestic Violence Legislation to include extending eligibility for Safety Orders to all parties who are or have been in an intimate relationship, to take account of property issues and the role of children in violent situations. Implement the unanimous recommendation of the Joint Oireachtas [parliamentary] Justice Committee report on Ireland's prostitution laws to criminalise the purchase of sex, while decriminalising those in prostitution.
- **Preventive Measures**
Condemn discrimination against women and recognise that violence against women is a violation of human rights and a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men.
- **Education and Training Initiatives:**
 - » Roll out the Social, Political and Health Education programme in Secondary Schools.
 - » Maintain the Stay Safe programme in Primary schools.
 - » Continue awareness raising initiatives including training for Judiciary, Gardaí and healthcare professionals.

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“Stopping violations of women’s human rights is a moral imperative ... Joining in the efforts to stop violence is everybody’s responsibility. Governments, private enterprises, civil society groups, communities and individual citizens can all make essential contributions. Men and boys must be active in encouraging respect for women and zero tolerance for violence. Cultural and religious leaders can send clear messages about the value of a world free of violence against women.”
*Former UN Women Executive Director,
Michelle Bachelet, 2010*