The Heart that Bites:

Violence Against Women

National Women's
Council of Ireland

Comhairle Náisiúnta
na mBan in Éirinn

REPORT FROM THE NWCI MILLENNIUM PROJECT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1   INTRODUCTION

In January 1999, the National Women's Council of Ireland initiated Women *Mapping the New Millennium,* a national research, analysis and action study. The research focused on six key areas of enquiry: violence against women, women and health, poverty, work, education and local development. The aim of the study was three-fold. First, to provide women across the country with the necessary skills and opportunity to have their voices heard. Second, to obtain women's views on each area in order to inform the NWCI's lobbying and policy strategies in the future. Finally, to explore and evaluate a model of participatory research and analysis which might form a basis for future ongoing research of this nature. This research could prove capable of assisting policy-makers and advisors, agencies, advocates, women and their communities with timely and appropriate information for policy formulation at local, regional and national levels.

This report presents the outcomes of the second of the above aims, that is, the views of the participants on the issue of *'Violence Against Women'.*

1.2   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using a Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) approach, which seeks to build bridges between locals at 'grassroots' level and policy makers at local, regional and national levels. Researchers who use PLA emphasise the fact that engaging in participatory research is a two-way learning process for all involved; that movement towards action is a central aim of the process; that a participatory approach can work equally well in urban and rural contexts, and that the techniques can be adapted and applied to a wide range of issues.

In the *'Violence Against Women'* component of the study, 7 facilitators engaged in research with 43 women located in Dublin city and County, and counties Monaghan and Limerick.

1.3   'VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN' BRIEF

Our brief was to work closely with a number of women in order to elicit their perspectives on and recommendations for dealing with violence against women in close adult relationships with men. Participants were encouraged to speak from personal experience, in their own terms, using their own language and categories of meaning. The distinctive voices and common threads which emerged from the four case-studies presented here invite us to enter into, and perhaps better understand, the diversity and possibilities among women experiencing violence in close adult relationships in Ireland today. This study employed a model of participatory research that, combined with other research approaches, might prove useful to community development groups, advocates, organisations and policy-makers at national, regional and local level when planning further research and creating policies aimed at the elimination of violence against women.

1.4   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions and recommendations arise from the four case-studies which constituted the *'Violence Against Women'* component of the Millennium Project and are relevant to the research brief outlined above. There is no intention to extrapolate from this small-scale study to the broader population. However, several analytical generalisations are drawn. Our main findings support fundamental tenets of the women's movement, for example, that male violence against women is about power and control, and therefore ongoing feminist analysis of existing patriarchal structures is critical to appropriate action. As will be apparent, our findings also support existing theoretical and practical frameworks currently in use by many NGOs[1] and other organisations supporting women who experience violence.

1.4.1   Conclusions

The main finding drawn from this study is that women, although classically presented as 'the problem' in relation to the dynamics of violent power relations, are, in fact, a key part of the solution. Survivors of violence are capable of offering 'insider expertise' to assist in the development of services, supports and policies oriented towards the elimination of violence against women from our society.

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[1] NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

- Analysis of structured gender inequality at local, national and international level is central to the philosophy of feminist organisations working on violence against women for the past 30 years in Ireland and globally. Such social/systemic analysis acts as a corrective to the pathologising of women, which constructs women experiencing violence as 'the problem' and obscures the responsibility of the perpetrator.

- Participants in this study, when invited to focus on the issue of violence against women, engaged unsolicited in this type of analysis, and indicated that they were highly aware of structured and institutionalised violence against women. Recognising the danger of being cast as 'the problem', participants re-present themselves throughout this study as survivors who are not, in any way, the problem, but a powerful part of the solution.

- From this perspective, participant's overall assessment of the current situation vis-à-vis violence against women in Ireland is that a radical transformation of patriarchal structures and systems is required, beginning with the legal and judicial systems.

- The civil and criminal justice system is the area where participants experienced the most devastating humiliation and disempowerment. This legal/judicial system requires "fundamental revision" and re-construction from the ground up; it needs to be "infused with emotional support" for women who experience violence and it needs to invite women to consult and participate in this process of re-construction. Participants stressed the need to provide specialised training and anti-racist education to the judiciary, the gardaí and service providers.

- The most effective action to support women's access to safety and support is awareness raising that violence against women is a crime. The silence that blankets this pervasive social problem must be broken. This cannot be safely achieved without support from the State and the community. However, regardless of the presence or absence of such support, women are taking the power to analyse, critique and reconstruct their lives where possible. Community education initiatives and programmes within refuge centres supported this process for many of the women involved in this study.

- Inter-agency co-operation and inter-departmental communication are central to effective implementation of policy. This is a key recommendation from the Government's Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women which is strongly supported by the participants in this study.

- As part of such a coherent inter-agency/inter-departmental approach, our findings, limited though they are to four case-studies, strongly suggest that women who have experienced violence and the advocates who work effectively with them have unique perspectives and valuable expertise to offer. Therefore, what we need to develop are better mechanisms to enable such expertise to lead and inform more effective and sensitive implementation of services and supports at ground level.

- Sensitive implementation of services and supports is crucial. Otherwise, we run the risk of 'missing' or alienating entire groups or categories of women who are experiencing violence and who need assistance. Given that 'woman' is not a unitary category and that diverse life experiences impact the manner in which violence is experienced, the responses women require will be diverse. We need to remain alert to opportunities to learn about such diversity. For example, this study notes how lack of direct access to information, difficulties in accessing the legal system, inaccessibility of services because of cultural/literacy issues, and racism create almost insurmountable barriers to security and safety for Traveller women experiencing violence.[2]
- We need to be informed by women at local level about new ways in which violence erupts and is perpetrated against them. This is the only way in which international and national law, policy and strategy can keep pace with these changes in order to develop appropriate policies and provide effective supports and services. Therefore, analysis and critique of structured gender inequality must, of necessity, be an ongoing adaptive process, alert to changes in socio-cultural systems and attuned to the perspectives of women themselves.

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[2] Pavee Point, funded under the NOW initiative 1998-1999, will be producing a document entitled 'Pavee Beoirs Breaking the Silence', a report exploring the dynamics of violence against Traveller women and related issues of racism.

1.4.2   Recommendations
- The Government's Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women, 1997, outlines strategies for an inter-agency co-operative approach to deal with violence against women. Participants would like to see these strategies implemented without delay.

- As a central part of this process, women in this study call for a fundamental revision of the civil and criminal justice systems. Safety and Sanctions (Kelleher and O'Connor, 1999) examined the effectiveness of the Irish civil and criminal justice systems' response to violence against women in intimate relationships and provided a thorough range of recommendations which ought to be implemented.

- Participants recommend specialised training for the judiciary and other key personnel. A framework for an educational programme based on women's emic[3] perspectives of the violence in their lives coupled with anti-racist training focused on the issue of violence against women (recognising the many ways in which women are categorised as 'deviant' and therefore experience racism) should be prepared. This educational programme should include information on women's diverse life circumstances and their related service and support needs. A gender-based analysis of issues of power and control, personal testimonies regarding women's experiences of violence and the development of their lives beyond abuse and towards safety and security might be included. This programme would be made available to the judiciary, service providers, agencies, community centres and other relevant organisations.[4] Women's Aid and some other NGOs concerned with the issue of violence against women have a series of training modules which are being delivered to the voluntary and statutory sectors at present based on all the principles outlined above.

- This educational programme could be developed in consultation with women who have experienced violence in intimate relationships, along with women who represent the many minority groups who share this experience in common but manage and survive it in different ways and advocates who work effectively with women experiencing violence.

- Participants strongly recommend education for children on violence issues[5]. School programmes currently in place which focus on the issue ought to be monitored, evaluated and reviewed using a stakeholder/participatory approach so that their effectiveness as a response to violence against women in close adult relationships can be gauged. Then due consideration ought to be given to their development.

- The First Report of the National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women, 1999, outlined some key priorities for action, one of which was a public awareness campaign. A core recommendation from the participants in this study is that such a campaign should be similar in scope to the 'Drink-

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[3] To distinguish between the terms 'emic' and 'etic': etic research is conducted from the outsider's perspective, while emic research takes the insider's perspective on board as the framework from which to explore and understand the issue in question. The terms are drawn from anthropology (Goodenough: 1956) and were borrowed from linguistics. Emic research is also known as ethnoscience, the New Ethnography, ethnomethodology and componential analysis.

[4] The Government's Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women has recommended specialist training for all members of the judiciary (p.56).Women's Aid and some other NGO's concerned with the issue of violence against women have a series of training programmes based on all the principles outlines above, which are currently being delivered to the Voluntary and statutory sectors.

[5] Women's Aid have just completed research on this issue and have used the results to develop modules for the youth sector; see Women's Aid (2001). Teenage Tolerance: the Hidden Lives of Young Irish People, a Study of Young People's Experience and Responses to Violence and Abuse. Dublin: Women's Aid. The "Exploring Masculinities" programme developed by the Department of Education and Science also works towards this aim. This programme aims to facilitate young males in transition year to critically explore what it means to be male in today's society and includes modules on violence against women and male power.

Driving' campaign.[6] This campaign included increased penalties for drinking and driving as well as police presence/ actions/ sanctions to effect change in attitude and practice. In the event that such a campaign is funded and planned, the Government should work closely with the NGO sector and provide the parallel funding necessary to make it possible for services to deal with the fallout that would be engendered by such media coverage.

• This public awareness campaign should be sensitive to and inclusive of cultural and literacy issues in terms of design, content, and preferred dissemination processes. It should be informed by information currently available on violence against women and by any new context- or culture-specific information generated via the educational and specialised training programmes suggested above.

• Alongside such campaigns, mechanisms enabling minority groups to access information in other formats and places should be considered. For example, Traveller women might be in a position to access information via their attendance at various types of training courses.[7] Organisations providing these courses should be targeted with relevant information in accessible formats.

• As public awareness is raised and the silence is broken, more women experiencing violence will come forward seeking services and support. Current funding is inadequate and existing services are over-subscribed, therefore additional funding must be made available.

• Participants recommend the provision of counselling and treatment programmes for perpetrators of violence against women in intimate relationships. This recommendation is best placed within the context of the Government's 1997 Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women which examined intervention programmes available in Ireland for violent men and outlined the principles that should underpin them. Primary among these is that the safety and security of women and children is paramount, and that intervention programmes be linked to judicial sanctions. Participants also recommend the introduction of a register of domestic violence offenders; that repeat offenders should be given stiffer sentences and that support should be widely and readily available in urban and rural areas after court cases.

• Communities (and the State) are called to become active responsible witnesses to the 'event' of violence against women in intimate relationships. Given that the formulation of the national strategy constitutes the basic response from Government Departments to this issue, in what ways might the community respond? Some key developments have taken place to date: Women's Aid were made one of the key supporting agencies to the community development sector; St. Michael's Estate Community Development Project developed a best practice guideline for a community development response to violence against women and the Community Worker's Co-operative have included community-based responses to violence against women in their general remit. Documentary research on community-based initiatives in other countries could highlight additional strategies that have proved successful and might usefully be adapted to the Irish socio-cultural context.

• Supports and services need to be implemented sensitively to take account of cultural diversity and minority groups. Women who have experienced violence in intimate relationships and who represent minority groups could advise on many issues related to the sensitive and effective delivery of information, supports and services.

• Traveller women indicate that their visibility would be increased and their profile strengthened if they were to find positions as paid and voluntary workers in refuge and other caring centres.
• Recognising the limited nature of current funding to provide services and supports for women experiencing violence, best practice guidelines need to be developed. Key stakeholders, including

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[6] The Government's Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women made a series of detailed recommendations regarding the need for successive public awareness campaigns (p.112). However, to date, we have had a limited awareness-raising exercise about the work of the National Steering Committee on Violence but no large-scale public awareness campaign conducted via the major media.

[7] For example, Pavee Point indicates that Traveller women would be able to access this information during the separate modules incorporated in many pre-marriage courses, and via a wide range of training courses Traveller women attend.

representatives from the NGO sector, service-providers, service-users and relevant Government departments might be best placed to inform criteria for fair and transparent funding, given sufficient resourcing in gender analysis and other relevant information. Consideration should be given to a stakeholder/participatory approach to eliciting an agreed range of criteria.

- Although we have been able to establish some sense of the supports participants in this study felt they needed to make the journey towards security and safety, further participatory research could help to establish a more in-depth picture of this complex process. Accepting that knowledge is power, these women's stories could serve to empower others and to alert the public to the nature of their experiences and survival of violence.

- The unattainable 'crucial support' identified by Group V4, 'Time for Oneself', is strongly linked by participants to the provision of childcare; therefore childcare should be provided as set out in the National Women's Council of Ireland's Childcare 2000 campaign.

2: INTRODUCTION

The National Women's Council of Ireland is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) currently operating as an agent of change[8] with and on behalf of women in Ireland facing a complex and rapidly changing society and culture. Over the past years, the work of the Council, coupled with that of other agencies and organisations, has achieved significant and life-enhancing change in ordinary women's lives. In 1998, approaching the third Millennium, and cognisant of significant shifts in the political, economic and social landscape in Ireland, the Council recognised that new models of partnership were rapidly emerging. This indicated the need, in turn, for new models of communication and information flow between people at local 'grassroots' level, policy makers, and the NWCI as a social partner. In seeking to develop and explore such a model, the Council proposed its Millennium Project: *Women Mapping the New Millennium.*

2.1 WOMEN MAPPING THE NEW MILLENNIUM
Women Mapping the New Millennium is a national research, analysis and action project that seeks to foster a process of empowerment that "has the potential to radically redesign the current paradigm that continues to produce social exclusion." (Zappone, in Kirby and Jacobsen, 1998: 56). It is a capacity-building programme that goes beyond the traditional notion of 'consultation' towards an active participatory experience of research, analysis and action.

The key objectives of the project are to:
*   design and explore an innovative model for forming national and local policy through direct participation by local actors;
*   provide women across the country with the training and capacity to conduct sustained social research and analysis;

*   encourage women to analyse the social and economic implications of their activities;

*   produce ongoing, up-to-date research on key experiences of women's lives –violence against women, poverty, healthcare, etc.;

*   build towards sustainable development of initiatives at local level.

At time of publication, we have a partial picture as to the extent to which the last of these objectives was reached. It is the NWCI's task to take the results of the research into the national policy arenas to which it has access. This work is ongoing. An evaluation is planned for the future in which policy-makers will be asked as to the Millennium Project's effect on Irish social policy.

We have evidence that some, but not all, of the women involved in the project have fed the results of their research into their local policy-making arenas and/ or have initiated an action at local level as an outcome of their research and the skills gained through participating in the project. While this 'action' phase was built into the project, it was optional for facilitators and for a number of reasons, for instance, lack of time or lack of resources, not every group could progress action at local level. Also, groups may have started these initiatives long after the end of the project. A mail-out at close of the project asked facilitators to outline in what ways they had used the skills gained through involvement with the project. These descriptions are available in the full reference report of the project available in the NWCI.

In many ways, the Millennium Project was a first step towards sustainable local action by the women involved. It represents the beginning of a developmental process. It illustrates the need for women to receive information, financial and training supports to pursue further projects which would enable them to investigate and challenge their environments.[9]

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[8] Agents of change or 'change-agents' is a term commonly used in majority-world development planning to denote organisations (governmental and non-governmental), institutions (public and private), community activists and communities themselves, policy-makers and advisors, individuals and professionals (e.g., researchers, technical experts, etc.) who seek to foster positive change in people's lives at community, national and/or international level.

[9] This issue is explored in more depth in, O'Reilly-de Brún et al. (2001). The Millennium Project: Women Mapping the New Millennium Executive Summary. Dublin: National Women's Council of Ireland.

2.2 RESEARCH AREAS

Six broad areas of research enquiry were identified via consultation with Council affiliates and advisory personnel:
• Violence against Women
• Women and Health
• Women and Work
• Women and Poverty
• Women and Education
• Women and Local Development (rural and urban)

2.3 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Where the term 'violence against women' is used in this report, it means ***violence against women in intimate or close relationships with adult males known to them.*** Violence against women is usually defined as inclusive of all forms of physical and sexual assault, psychological, emotional and verbal abuse, sexual harassment, trafficking in women, pornography, prostitution and attempts to control women's financial resources. However, our focus in this report is solely on the issue of domestic violence, defined in the Irish Government's Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women, 1997, as "the use of physical or emotional force or threat of physical force including sexual violence, in close adult relationships." This is the perspective from which the participants are speaking. We are not, however, using the term 'domestic violence' because it tends to obscure the fact that there is a perpetrator, a person who is responsible for the violent act, and in our choice of language we wish to retain that consciousness throughout this report.

An overview of the human rights discourse and international and European research on violence against women suggests that we have insufficient quantitative and qualitative data on this issue. An emphasis on the value and need for inclusion of women's voices has been a central philosophy of feminist research on violence against women for many years. This small-scale qualitative case-study, conducted in a participatory manner, may provide a basis for the development of a model of research which could usefully be employed alongside other approaches and methods to help build our understanding of this complex issue. Such combined approaches may prove capable of including women's voices alongside those of other stakeholders – advocates, policy-makers, service-providers – who are working to support women experiencing violence.

The nature and scope of this study is limited – we do not suggest that our results, conclusions and recommendations be applied to, or speak for, the broader community. However, the reader may find points of common interest or confirmation of already-established theories, practices and actions reflected in the participants voices.

2.4 PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH APPROACH

What shape does this research take? How research is designed, and from whose perspective, radically informs the content and results of any research project. This, in turn, informs the policies developed in response to those results. The Millennium Project utilised an emic approach and participatory methodology, which are described in detail in the methodology section of this report.

2.5 THE POLICY-INFLUENCING POTENTIAL OF THE MILLENNIUM PROJECT

The Millennium Project has the potential to address several 'audiences' and therefore to influence policy at various levels. Intended audiences for the results and recommendations of this study include: the National Women's Council of Ireland and its affiliate membership, policy-makers and advisors in key Government departments, NGOs, agencies, community groups and advocates concerned about violence against women and related issues.

Policy makers and advisors cannot develop viable policy in a vacuum. They require constant assistance from those who are the intended beneficiaries of policies. At the same time, women cannot hope to improve their situation if their voices and expertise remain unsolicited and unheard; they need constant assistance from those who have the power and vision to seek that expertise and build it into progressive policy. A feature of the Millennium Project is the model it employs in order to bring women's experiences, their needs, suggestions for change and potential solutions, into the heart of action and planning at local, regional and national level.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The international women's rights movement has, over the past two decades, contributed much to a rapidly developing international consciousness that women's rights are human rights. This consciousness has become central to any discussion about violence against women and it is therefore important to situate this small-scale qualitative case study report within that larger context. There is a rich and extensive body of literature available on the complex issue of violence against women; the following review is necessarily selective and is not intended to provide a comprehensive overview. It does, however, focus on key issues that relate specifically to the 'distinctive voices' which emerged from the four case studies constituting this component of the Millennium Project.

3.2 WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS:
ANALYSING STRUCTURED GENDER INEQUALITY

The developing international consciousness that women's rights are human rights has been firmly based on ongoing analysis of *structured gender inequality* at both the local and global level. This analysis must be of a continuous nature because the ways in which violence against women is perpetrated changes over time. For example, women can now be bought and sold as 'sex slaves' over the Internet, making the Internet a powerful new (and unregulated) medium for the sex trafficking of women (Community Worker's Co-operative, 1999). Ongoing analysis must keep pace with these developments in order to foster the expansion of appropriate laws, services, sanctions and supports to protect women and bring perpetrators to justice.

In order to exclude any group from the benefits of human rights, those who possess the power to do so must define that group as less-than-fully-human (Bunch, 1995; Moore, 1993). This cultural definition can be overt or covert and is usually based on any one, or a combination of identities: gender, class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, ability and so on.

In most societies, women, simply and wholly because they are women, are considered second-class persons within the social structure. Males are presented as the 'normative' positive identity, and females are constructed as 'deviant' from this norm in either overt or covert ways (O'Reilly-de Brún, 1992). Ascribing negative identity to females is the basis for all other types of pathologising of women (for example, presenting women who experience violence as 'damaged personalities' who 'attract' violent behaviour and whose complaints should therefore not be taken seriously). This negative gender identity is built into the fabric of many societies (French, 1985; Moore, 1993) and serves to present women as ineligible to claim full human rights.

This explains why human rights organisations working on local, national and international policy have discovered how difficult it is to have women's rights placed on the human rights agenda. When they draw attention to gender-based abuses (for example: inequality of opportunity in education, employment, housing, credit, and health care; rape and domestic violence; reproductive freedom; the valuation of childcare and domestic labour) such organisations find that "these issues are considered marginal to international law's more 'serious' responsibility for human rights" (Peters and Wolper, 1995). Traditional human rights work is based on a 'normative' male model, beneath which women's perspectives on human rights remain unheard and unattended.

In support of this argument, Charlotte Bunch notes that, while the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (adopted in 1948) can be interpreted to offer the rights and freedoms set out in the Declaration to all people equally, without distinction of any kind, including sex, there has been little elaboration of these rights from women's perspectives. Therefore we enter the third Millennium without a "significant body of international human rights law and practice" in the area of rape, battery, etc., which might support women world-wide (Bunch, 1995).

Historically, the covenant-makers who first advanced the cause of human rights were Western-educated men concerned mainly with threats to their own civil and political rights, violations which occurred in the 'public sphere'. Most violence against women occurred (and still occurs) in the 'private' sphere of the home (Peters and Wolper, 1995). Masters of the 'private sphere' and dominant in the core male-female power relationships within it, the covenant makers perceived no threat to themselves in this arena and

excluded it from their human rights work. This led to a primary and almost exclusive focus in the human rights movement on State-sanctioned or –condoned oppression, to the exclusion of the private sphere to which most women are relegated and in which most violations of women's rights take place. This is why violence against women is still tacitly and even legally considered in many societies to be a private matter rather than a social crime, and why this false separation of public and private needs to be broken down.

3.2.1   Placing women's rights centre-stage

Charlotte Bunch notes that women are undertaking this task and placing women's human rights centre-stage by taking leading roles in redefining social concepts and policy issues in human rights work (Bunch, 1995). Taking up these roles at both local and global level moves women from the margins to the centre, making women's issues and women's rights less easily 'ghettoised'. Women are aware that:

"[The] definition of certain people as less human, as not deserving human rights or full participation in society, becomes the basis upon which violence against them is tolerated and sometimes even State supported" (Bunch, 1995).

3.2.2   The role of research on gender-based violence against women

Part of the struggle to gain international attention for women's human rights involved highlighting research that revealed the depth of the anti-female bias supporting gender-based violence against women worldwide. Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze (1989) calculated that female infanticide accounts for approximately 80 to 100 million 'missing' women, who would otherwise populate our world today, matching more closely the numbers of men currently doing so. These women are missing because, for a variety of reasons, they were considered less valuable than the male of the species and therefore utterly dispensable. There were insufficient legal and social sanctions in place to prevent their deaths. This "reveals in quiet statistics a gruesome story of anti-female bias" (ibid: 53). This anti-female bias extends across the female lifespan; Peters and Wolper (1995) note that "girls die and are physically and mentally maimed by inequitable distribution of resources."[10] Recent research and government reports from the European Union and Ireland confirm the international story for adult females: the vast majority of victims and survivors of violence are women and the vast majority of perpetrators are men (Kelleher and O' Connor, 1995, 1999; Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women, 1997; Unveiling the Hidden Data on Domestic Violence in the European Union, 1999).

"Gender-based abuse and discrimination may be sanctioned by society, made into law, or simply tolerated. Either way, under democracy and dictatorship, in times of war and times of peace, women's human rights are violated daily and often systematically" (Peters and Wolper, 1995).

3.2.3   Gender-based violence against women – some international and European-based responses

Success in identifying gender-based violence in this way led to many key developments in the areas of international human rights work and research at European Union level on the issue of violence against women, including:

- In 1993, the women's caucus of the Second World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna demanded that gender-based issues such as female infanticide, trafficking in women, woman battering and rape (among many other atrocities perpetrated against women) be put on the table whenever the UN Treaty Committees meet to monitor and seek reinforcement of their treaties' provisions. The conference responded by declaring that "the full and equal enjoyment by women of all human rights" be a priority for all national governments and the United Nations (Charlesworth, 1995). The resulting document was called the UN Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence Against Women (1993).

- The international Women's Movement on Violence clearly articulated the view that violence against women is unacceptable and men should be made responsible for their own violence. In Ireland, feminist organizations working with women experiencing abuse such as Women's Aid, Refuges and Rape Crisis Centres, strongly challenged therapists and academics who presented violence against women in gender-neutral terms, or presented women as agents of their own victimisation (Kelleher and O'Connor, 1995). Such gender-blind practices identify women as 'the problem' and deflect therapeutic attention (and legal sanctions) away from the perpetrators.

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[10] In this instance, Peters and Wolper are speaking mainly about female children in developing countries, but we suggest that as long as any child is abused on the basis of gender, all children, both male and female, remain open to human rights abuses.

- Most recently (1999) the European Women's Lobby produced Unveiling the Hidden Data on Domestic

Violence in the European Union. This overview presents conservative estimates of the prevalence of violence against women within the 15 Member States. The 'cautious estimate' that more than 1 in 5 women (between 20 and 25% of all women) have been subjected to physical violence by a partner is entirely sobering. The study also notes the importance of maintaining a focus on the perpetrator of violence as women have too long and often been presented as the problem, when, in fact, we are facing a social problem of endemic proportions:

"While these statistics are still inadequate, they represent a first attempt to take into account something that is no longer limited to 'home', to this private sphere that too often provides neither safety nor aid. They also reveal that this violence must be taken into account everywhere and that it affects women of all cultures and social classes. Finally, they reveal that this is not just a women's problem, but a social problem, and that it is high time something was done about it" (Unveiling the Hidden Data on Domestic Violence in the European Union, 1999).

3.3 IRELAND – BUILDING A NATIONAL STRATEGY TO RESPOND TO THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

We have mentioned that analysis of structured gender inequality acts as a corrective to the notion that women are 'the problem' and properly re-constructs the issue of violence against women.[11] In Ireland, in 1971, the first Rape Crisis Centre opened its doors (Neary, 2000). Symbolic of many efforts to break the silence and reconstruct the issue of violence against women, this open door ushered in a range of responses over the next thirty years. It would be impossible to provide an exhaustive list of the many initiatives that developed over the past three decades, but a flavour of some of the research, policy and service-provision developments in the last decade includes:

- The Sonas Housing Association which was established in 1991 to provide housing for women referred through refuges.

- The community-based Family Resource Centre Community Development Project, St. Michael's Estate, Inchicore, in a joint venture with Women's Aid since 1991, has piloted an integrated voluntary and professional Community Response to the issue of violence against women.

- In 1993, the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Investigation Unit of the Garda Síochána was established.

- From 1994, the Cork Domestic Violence Project devised and provided treatment programmes for perpetrators and supports for women experiencing violence.

- In 1994, the Federation of Irish Refuges (known since 1998 as the National Network of Refuges and Support Services) produced an important policy document for women's refuges.

- In 1995, *Making the Links*, a study commissioned by Women's Aid, provided the first systematic data on violence against women in the home in the Republic of Ireland and an account of service responses at area level.

- In 1996, the Domestic Violence Act became law (considered a legal milestone in Irish legislation on domestic violence).

- In 1990, the Criminal Law (Rape) Amendment Act clarified that marital rape was a crime.

- In 1996, Women's Aid prepared *Zero Tolerance,* a national strategy document on the elimination of violence against women.

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[11] For example, women are often judged as 'weak' or 'stupid' and blamed for staying in abusive relationships – why doesn't she leave? The question should be: what prevents this woman from finding safety and security in her life?

- In 1996, the NWCI produced the *Report of the Working Party on the Legal and Judicial Process for Victims of Sexual and Other Crimes of Violence Against Women and Children.*

- In October 1996, the Government set up a Task Force on violence against women to develop a co-ordinated response and strategy to the issue.

- In 1997, the *Report of the Task Force on Violence Against Women* was published. Included was the revised edition (1997) of the Garda Síochána Policy on Domestic Violence Intervention.

- In 1998, Tuam Community Development Resource Centre produced *Towards a Community Response to Domestic Violence* - including information on the prevalence of domestic violence in Tuam rural district, an assessment of current service provision and suggestions for community responses to domestic violence.

- By 1998, the total number of refuges in Ireland had expanded to 17.

- In 1999, the Community Worker's Co-operative published *Violence Against Women – an Issue for Community Work* in which they set out a framework for responding to violence against women at community level.

- In 1999, Kelleher and O'Connor produced Safety and Sanctions, research on domestic violence and the enforcement of law in Ireland.

- In March 1999, the *First Report of the National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women* was published; the purpose of the Committee was to outline a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency cohesive response to the problem of violence against women.

- In 2000, the Network of Rape Crisis Centres, Ireland, produced *'A consideration of the Model of Service Provision Employed by Rape Crisis Centres in Ireland'*, outlining a survivor/recovery model where the focus was on the promotion of well-being and acknowledgement of the survivor's resources and positive strengths. In the same year, the network also produced *'Securing the Future of Rape Crisis Centres in Ireland'.*[12]

A review of the above documentation and information indicates that there is a clear acknowledgement of the necessity for and centrality of analysis of structured gender inequality leading to an awareness of the types of services required to provide a comprehensive and effective range of supports and services to women experiencing violence. There is also a general awareness that responsibility for violence against women must always rest with the perpetrator, and more broadly, with the State and the community. There is urgent need for treatment, sanctions and legislative responses to deal with perpetrators. Funding for services and non-governmental support and advocacy organisations needs to be substantially increased.

While much of this is reflected in the 1997 Government Task Force publication of the national strategy on violence against women, the report recognised that services "have developed in a piecemeal and relatively haphazard way rather than as a co-ordinated strategy. There are gaps in services which must be filled" and the report recommended that "a co-ordinated partnership approach between the voluntary, community and public sectors is necessary if women are to be presented with a realistic set of coherent options." The gap, then, is not at the level of theory or discourse, but at the level of practice and provision of resources to enable adequate responses.

3.4 ACTING LOCALLY – SEEING WOMEN AS PART OF THE SOLUTION

Given that delivery of the necessary funding, services and supports can be a slow and difficult task, Bunch urges us not to "wait for permission from some authority from above" to proceed with the task of taking better account of women's lives, experiences and perspectives, but to act locally (Bunch, 1995). Marie Suarez Toro supports this view of the importance of community responsibility in speaking out about

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[12] This document contained two important and distinct reports: 'A Conceptual View of Employment Policy, Development and Funding of Rape Crisis Centres in Ireland' by Sarah Morton, identifying a model of funding, and 'Can Counselling Help?' by Frances Larkin, focusing on counselling in Rape Crisis Centres.

gender-based violence against women, and acknowledges the power of local communities to take concrete actions against such practices. Toro lays out the current challenge for advocates of women's human rights working at local level:

- contribute to the empowerment of women in everyday life;

- make a *tangible* difference in women's lives by implementing the kinds of change they themselves choose;

- hold the United Nations and individual governments accountable for the needs and rights of women in their own very diverse communities and in the global governance.

This recognition of the responsibility of the community moves the work of local groups firmly to centre-stage. Women experiencing violence must be offered the necessary skills and training to conduct sustained social analysis of gender inequality as they experience it, and examine the myriad ways in which this enables and supports gender-based violence as they experience it in their everyday lives.[13] This creates the space to reject formulations of power-relations between men and women that relegate women to secondary status and to challenge traditional assumptions about roles, statuses and definitions of identity which demean and pathologise women.

Local level information is also crucial to ongoing policy-making at all levels. Ongoing input from local groups to advocates working at regional, national or international level enables the expansion of awareness and understanding of these hitherto obscured and silenced experiences:

"…lobbying and advocacy at the international [and national] level are effective only insofar as they are grounded in the day-to-day experiences of women…" (Toro, 1995).

3.5 WOMEN SEEING THEMSELVES AS PART OF THE SOLUTION

Feminist and civil rights movements have highlighted the concept that oppressed groups internalise negative stereotypes and self-images. Women experiencing violence often suffer the oppressive accusation that they are 'the problem'. One action which seems to break through this pathologising of women is the analysis of structured gender inequality; women develop a view of the 'bigger picture' of structured violence, and this often enables them to shift the burden of blame from their own shoulders to its rightful location: the perpetrator. This can create space for women to develop more positive self-images and begin to see themselves as, not the problem at all, but an important part of the solution.

Accessing the power to do this means first breaking the silence surrounding experiences of violence and this renders women particularly vulnerable. A wide range of supports and sanctions are necessary to safeguard women who take the power and courage to engage in such analysis.

3.5.1   *Analysis must lead to positive action*

Analysis at local level must lead to positive action at local level. Toro is confident that appropriate concrete responses to issues of violence against women can arise from within the community:

"In approaching the subject of women's rights as human rights, almost all would agree that what is needed are not mere legal abstractions but, rather, concrete measures that emerge from and respond to the lives of women – real women, in all their diversity" (Toro, 1995).

Working at local level towards concrete change can create and reinforce solidarity with other women experiencing violence across diverse cultures and in diverse life circumstances. This is important because the circumstances in which women experience violence are diverse and require a range of responses; what works in one community or even for one group/individual may not work for another. Looking to women within the community as important and knowledgeable stakeholders, and bringing that stakeholder expertise into contact and conversation with other stakeholders, may encourage the development of local solutions to problems of gender-based violence. To subsume all women into a unitary category, and

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[13] Speaking from extensive experience of the Central American situation, Toro notes that efforts to enhance human rights there in the 1990s had little or no impact on the basic status of women because none of the struggles for social change addressed the "patriarchal foundations of our political, economic and social structures, of our cultures, relationships and socialisation" (Toro, 1995).

subsume all experiences of violence against women into another undifferentiated category, will simply make some women's experiences and needs recede into the background. We must guard against this by developing sensitivity to diversity.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION: THE DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH METHODS AND SOCIAL POLICY

Research approaches and methods radically influence research content and, consequently, the policies designed in response to that content. Traditionally, research funding in Ireland has privileged large-scale survey-style research, and it has been a struggle to find support for smaller-scale qualitative research. The NGO sector has made strategic decisions regarding what type of research is necessary to support particular policy outcomes, but the salient question that remains is this: Is it the intention of social policy research to describe the current situation, to change it, or both? (Cantillon, 1998). What might small-scale predominantly qualitative research projects like the Millennium Project contribute to each of these objectives?

Many authors have demonstrated the inability of researchers using exclusively quantitative methods to attend to the "persistent requirement in social policy to understand complex behaviours, needs, systems and cultures" (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, 173; Cantillon, 1998; Hallett, 1996; Ruspini, 1999). As Irwin (1987) says, "Human behaviour and social existence is a subjective and wilful construction and requires drawing close to subjects in their natural contexts and understanding the fundamental human process." This 'drawing close' can best be achieved by using qualitative approaches because they provide "an opportunity, albeit briefly, to see the world from another person's point of view" (Schein, 1995).

This is a lesson strongly reflected by what policy-makers in 'developing' countries in the majority world have learned: all the components of social policy – not just the technical and economic, but also the social and cultural – have to be taken into account (Kane & O' Reilly-de Brún, 2001). All the parties involved in research and policy-making – governments, sponsors, local people and external experts – have a unique perspective to contribute (Cernea, 1991). This holistic approach to research and effective policy-formation demands that we make the best possible use of available methods and techniques and involve local people – in our case, women who have or are currently experiencing violence – to the fullest possible extent in the process of research, analysis and action-planning.

4.2 FROM THE OUTSIDE IN, OR THE INSIDE OUT? CONTRASTING APPROACHES TO RESEARCH

Research is designed and approached in two main ways, which contrast strongly in terms of perspective, method and therefore outcome. The more traditional approach, and the one most people are familiar with, might be described as doing research 'from the outside in'. This is called the 'etic' approach, and is reflected in the question: "What do I see these women doing/ how will I describe their experiences?" Such research is conducted from the perspective of professional 'outsiders', the framework for the research is decided in advance, and the 'research group' is usually perceived as a passive participant in the process.

In contrast, taking an emic approach means doing research 'from the inside out', and is reflected in the question: "What do these women see themselves doing/ how do they describe their experiences?" This approach sees the research group as expert in its own right, and takes that perspective on board, often placing it in positive articulation with other expert opinion. In emic research, the language and categories of analysis used by the group become the framework or lens through which the data is viewed and analysed, and the research group is involved in an active and participatory way throughout the research process.

Feminist research methodology is similarly focused on active participation of women and others in the research process 'stemming from a concern that existing methodologies support sexist, racist and elitist attitudes and therefore negatively affect people's lives' (Holland et al., 1995). The feminist research project proposes not a prescriptive, distinctly feminist set of methods, but a variety of methods employed with the objective of bringing women's experiences from the margins to the centre. The objective, in terms of research outcomes, is the development of recommendations which position women's interests centrally in policy debates and maximize their potential for implementation into policy and practice. As such, the objectives of Participatory Learning and Action as a research strategy for this project serve as an appropriate vehicle to place women and their concerns at the centre of the research process. The research strategy is outlined below.

4.3 RESEARCH STRATEGY: PARTICIPATORY LEARNING AND ACTION (PLA)

The NWCI Millennium Project was designed to respond to the challenges and concerns we have noted, and a PLA **(Participatory Learning and Action)** research strategy was adopted. PLA is open to the integration of quantitative and qualitative research techniques and we have utilised it here in a predominantly qualitative manner.[14] A PLA approach possesses the necessary flexibility to explore issues of a sensitive nature, where 'drawing close' to women's actual lived experience of violence is essential to making visible the complex realities of their lives. PLA can be described as "a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act" (Chambers, 1994c). This research strategy provided the women involved in the project with tools to develop analytical frameworks that make sense of their experience and articulate their vision for a more positive future.

PLA emphasises the fact that engaging in participatory research can be a multi-faceted learning experience for all the stakeholders involved; action is a central aim of the process; this approach works equally well in urban and rural contexts and the techniques can be adapted and applied to myriad issues. Essentially, PLA seeks to build bridges between locals at 'grassroots' level and policy makers at local, regional and national level.

Key features of PLA include:
• giving credence to the insights and abilities of local people to share and enhance their knowledge of the issue in question;
• using emic research to elucidate the 'insider view' and uncover local categories of meaning and analysis;
• avoiding the biases that have characterised much research done from the outsider's point of view (Kane, 1995), and
• 'handing over the stick', meaning to actively encourage local participation and development of positive action planning.

This research strategy is now in use world-wide in organisations as diverse as UNICEF, Save the Children, WorldVision, Ipas and The World Bank.

4.4 RESEARCH SCHEDULE

4.4.1   Training Programme
Training for the Millennium Project took place in two distinct phases: Phase One training spanned March to October 1999 and provided practical training in basic PLA principles and techniques. Phase Two training spanned March to May 2000 and covered more fundamental issues in PLA.

An enormous amount of material was covered in each of the training sessions in groups where women had differing levels of knowledge about research and group facilitation. Since an aim of the project was capacity-building, participants did not have to have prior experience of any of the above. Facilitation skills are extremely important in PLA research. Also important to the research is note-taking during research techniques. Both facilitation and note-taking were covered briefly in the training.
Feedback from the PLA facilitators[15] indicates that a number felt that they would like more training in facilitation and note-taking:

'[I would suggest] more in-depth training on bettering facilitation techniques – this is vital in both encouraging and energising a group to get to their full potential' (PLA facilitator).

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[14] PLA has grown out of and has much in common with Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).
Using the term PLA emphasises the participatory nature of the enquiry, and the learning and action-planning aspects of this approach.

[15] As the women involved were called after completion of the first phase of training.

4.4.2   Research Schedule

At the close of each of the 13 training programmes nation-wide, facilitation teams were invited to negotiate and choose one of the six topics as their 'national' issue (meaning it was being researched by other teams across the country). They were also invited to devise a 'local' topic of their choice ('local' meaning it could be a topic unique to the locality). In many cases, teams preferred to select another of the six issues for their local topic because it matched their concerns and those of their research groups. Research was conducted over the period May 1999 – May 2000. Teams were provided with back-up support from one of four Millennium Project staff.

4.5 RESEARCH METHODS

The *'Violence against Women'* component of the Millennium Project involved several processes:
- methods:
    - sampling;
    - research outlines and selection of data-collection techniques;
    - data analysis.

- putting appropriate monitoring and evaluation procedures in place;

- ethical issues.

4.5.1   Sampling

PLA Facilitators: The initial project design aimed to draw members from NWCI affiliate organisations to train 120 facilitators in teams of 2, giving us 60 teams nation-wide. In early 1999, the NWCI had 142 affiliates. All received information packs about the proposed Project and invitations to nation-wide Information Sessions. Project information was also made available via NWCI Panel Meetings and affiliates were invited to consider nominating women for inclusion in training. 41 affiliates responded. Doing research on violence against women is highly sensitive and both facilitators and participants must be adequately safeguarded. Because of this and related restrictions, only a small number of teams were in a position to take on this issue. 4 teams carried out research, 1 each in city and County Dublin, 1 in County Limerick and 1 in County Monaghan, with a total of 43 participants.

Research Participants: Intensive qualitative study of a small number of cases can lead to valuable understandings about the experience of violence against women. The 43 participants involved in this study constitute a non-probability purposeful sample. The principle of selection is the researcher's judgement as to applicability (Robson 1993). The value of non-probability sampling lies in the depth and quality of information generated in the research encounter.[16]

Facilitation teams gathered their research participants mainly via network sampling. In the main, the teams were already linked with participants either through a refuge or courses and centres catering to women's needs. A basic criterion for selection was that participants were women who had experienced violence in close adult relationships.

4.5.2   Research outlines and selection of data-collection techniques

The NWCI Millennium Project Team consulted with affiliates, policy analysts and advisors in order to develop the design for the six research topics. Analysis of the data generated via this consultation, coupled with further input from the NWCI Policy Team, resulted in the identification of key elements for the 'Violence Against Women' component.

The 4 teams followed the sequence of techniques outlined below:

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[16] As our study sample is not a probability one, we are not making claims for statistical representativeness or significance of our findings.

4.5.2.1 'Violence against Women' – range of techniques and sequence:

- **Matrix of Supports and Sources of Support** was designed to identify current local supports, formal and informal, for women experiencing violence. The matrix also showed the strengths and weaknesses of correlation between supports and sources of support.

- **Card Sort, Step1** enabled participants to study a set of pre-prepared cards naming essential practical and policy responses to violence against women. The group then decided whether to retain or discard cards.[17]

- **Brainstorming Exercise:** Participants were invited to 'brainstorm' to develop up to 10 extra cards identifying additional responses and positive actions necessary to support women experiencing violence. This advanced the card sort from our pre-prepared etic data to include participants' emic data.

- Card Sort, Step 2: To learn more about emic categories operating within the group, participants created a set of categories into which they 'bundled' all their cards. This provided insights into how participants related 'responses' and 'positive actions' and integrated them into a coherent whole.

- **Direct Ranking:** Participants proceeded to rank the entire bundle of cards on the basis of which was the most important to have available in circumstances where women were experiencing violence.

- The **Imagination Exercise** engaged participants in a description of a society free of violence, focusing on several themes including places where violence no longer occurs; the nature of healthy relationships between women, men and children; the resources, systems and processes necessary to support this environment.

- Finally, the group was invited to create a **Timeline**. Starting by imagining a violence-free society in 2020, the group worked backwards towards devising an action plan to achieve that goal, in steps spanning blocks of 5 years. (Working backwards in this manner helps to keep participants positively focused on the end goal). During these last two exercises, participants focused mainly on a society free of violence towards women, but also broadened their focus to include some elements which would be supportive of this.

4.5.3 Data analysis

PLA analysis is usually undertaken on-site, is of an organic formative nature and is a collaborative effort by facilitators and participants alike (Chambers, 1994b and c). Due to the limited resources at the disposal of the research team and the breadth of the project itself, this approach was not feasible for this project.

Analysis of the returned research data was, therefore, conducted in-house. It is important to stress that this does not mean participants were completely removed from the analytical process: because many of the techniques are, in and of themselves, analytical tools, participants were involved in preliminary analysis at the local level. For example, by completing matrices and direct ranking, by conducting card sorts and creating timelines, participants analysed primary data as they generated it. They prioritised and categorised; they showed correlation and created bases for action planning and policy development. Observation notes were, in many cases, highly analytical in content, providing the team with clear insights into key categories and themes we were then able to use as the basis of our analysis.

Data arising from PLA research is often a mix of textual and numerical data, each of which are interdependent on the other. Brewer and Hunter (1989) point out that qualitative research in general is inherently multi-method in focus, and this use of 'methodological triangulation' (Janesick 1998) is central to the strategies employed by PLA. The five techniques (matrices, card sorts, brainstorming, direct ranking, imagination exercise/timeline) used in the *'Violence against Women'* component produced data in different forms.

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[17] The pre-prepared cards were on the following issues: women's refuges, support from family and friends, financial support, information in public places, support and advocacy services, prevention and awareness programmes in schools for girls and boys, quick response and action from gardaí, training on violence against women for GPs and a clear public message that violence against women is wrong.

Multiple analytic tools were used to deal with the different forms of data:

RESEARCH TECHNIQUE	ANALYTIC TOOL EMPLOYED
Background questionnaires	SPSS
Facilitator evaluation forms	SPSS
Matrices	Microsoft Word
Card Sort Step 1 & 2	Microsoft Access
Brainstorming	Microsoft Access
Card Sort 'Categories and Characteristics'	Microsoft Word
Direct Ranking	Microsoft Access
Notes from Imagination Exercise	Microsoft Word
Time Line	Microsoft Word
Observation Notes	Microsoft Word

Because extended co-analysis was not feasible for the project, the team became aware of questions arising from the research that could not always be answered, for instance, when observation notes from facilitators did not expand on the emic concepts being used by groups or did not clarify decisions that were made during the techniques. Research is always somewhat unpredictable and questions will arise in the research that are as important as the rich descriptions of phenomena that are present in the data. In other words, the team did not expect to present the definitive voice on each of the six issues, but to employ a way of investigating the issues that could be improved and built upon in the future. The team understood that, "no picture is ever complete…what is needed is many perspectives, many voices, before we can have deep understandings of social phenomena" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Thus, where appropriate, we have identified where information was not available and have made suggestions for future research.

As the *'Violence against Women'* issue was undertaken by just 4 groups, we employed 'collective case study' analysis.

4.5.4   Collective case studies
Case studies are usually small scale, in-depth studies with a very specific focus: they are intended to illuminate an issue rather than provide data for the expansion of theory or the development of statistical or representational information. Exploration of the system in all its complexity can reveal information that provides insight into an issue, in our case, the issue of violence against women. Stake describes this type of case study as 'instrumental case study' (Stake in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

While a single instrumental case study is valuable in and of itself, a small number of similar studies may provide a measure of breadth to the overall result. This is simply instrumental case study extended to several cases, and Stake uses the term 'collective case study' to distinguish this approach (Ibid. p.89).

4.5.5   The relationship between collective case study and policy
In what ways can readers or policy-makers generalise from results drawn from a small collective case-study like this? Yin (1990) stresses the importance of making a clear distinction between *statistical generalisation* (which we are not attempting) and *analytic generalisation*, to which we believe this study can contribute.

Collective case study, with its attention to uniqueness, particularity and diversity, is capable of advancing our analysis of women's perspectives on the experience of violence. Analytical generalisation from particular case study insights is possible because we realise that knowledge is 'produced' or 'constructed' in the research encounter – we learn what the participants believe may help to address their diverse needs and how they perceive themselves as part of the solution. This is re-presented in the published report and interacted with by the readers. This interaction is key to the development of analytical generalisation.

4.5.6   The case study as 'construction of knowledge'

The reader (policy-maker, advocate, concerned citizen) interprets the knowledge contained in the report, bringing her/his own accumulated knowledge to the interaction. This builds a new construction of knowledge about the key issues explored. "We come to know what has happened partly in terms of what others reveal as their experience" (Stake, in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 95). We also contribute to what may happen in the future because we carry this 'new knowledge' into every life situation and professional arena where violence against women is concerned. This case study stands as an invitation, then, to enter the world of the participants, to see and hear the experience of violence and the hope they assert, from their varied and multiple perspectives. It is an invitation to interact with their construction of events and meanings, values and dreams, and become party to the ongoing construction of knowledge around the issues concerned.

On this basis, we can make the modest claim that the results the participants produced and lay before us in this report, via their illustrative power and their interaction with various readers, contribute to the body of knowledge about violence against women in Ireland. The results may confirm aspects of this issue previously established; they may help to identify areas of potential crisis or failure in current service-provision. Avenues and topics for further exploration might arise in response to the results.

4.5.7   Sampling within the collective case

Collective case studies are chosen with a view to advancing understanding; sampling within the case means selecting groups, locations, themes and events that are diverse in a number of ways. The main criterion for sampling is *opportunity to learn* (Stake in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998:102). We are fortunate that the four case studies are diverse in many respects and include women from urban and rural settings, including a cross-border area; women from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and educational experience; settled and Traveller women; women who work both inside and outside their homes; women from various religious denominations; women who are single, partnered, separated, married; women who have moved on from an abusive relationship and others who are still struggling within one. This diversity provides us with many perspectives on the issue of violence against women.

4.5.8   Designing appropriate monitoring and evaluation procedures

An essential aspect of any research project is an evaluation component. This is especially true where the research aims to encourage people to become 'stakeholders' in the study. To this end, a framework for ongoing monitoring and evaluation was designed to give facilitators the opportunity to tell us what worked well and what could be improved. Multiple data sources were employed, including:

*   Observation notes accompanying the returned research.
*   Evaluations of training programmes.
*   Facilitators' comments at the 'Gathering Day' (an event organised by the team in February 2000 to gather facilitators together, to hear about the experiences they had while conducting research).

Facilitators' evaluation questionnaire (a questionnaire designed in order to obtain facilitators' feedback about the project as a whole).

4.6 ETHICAL ISSUES

Facilitators were asked to remain aware that violence may start or escalate when a woman becomes involved in any group or project focusing on violence against women. Therefore, it was essential to establish the best possible level of safety and trust within the research group, and to ensure the continuing safety of all participants.

Two practical steps were put in place to address the need for safety and security. First, during the initial training programme, facilitators were advised to take up the issue of violence against women only if they were already experienced in this area, had adequate knowledge of the dangers involved and were confident that they could put the necessary safety measures in place to provide security for themselves and the research group.

The second practical step was to establish the presence, nature and extent of local safety measures and supports: each research group completed a matrix of available local supports and identified the source(s) of those supports. This built group knowledge about assistance available in the immediate vicinity, what supports were considered most effective and how exactly to access them, if necessary.

Confidentiality guidelines were provided in the training manuals and discussed with facilitators, as was the need to respect boundaries and assure participants of their rights during the research process. Names of participants and names of affiliate groups were not mentioned in released material without consent. If data from one affiliate group was used during training or to be released, explicit consent for this was sought from the facilitators involved.

5. RESULTS

5.1 RESPONSE RATE

4 groups completed research on *'Violence Against Women'*, 2 as their 'national' topic and 2 as their 'local' topic. The total number of participants was 43. The geographical distribution of these groups is as follows:

County Limerick: 1 group
County Dublin: 1 group
County Monaghan: 1 group
Dublin city: 1 group

A sample profile of the participants in this component has not been included due to confidentiality issues and also because it is felt that the background information offered for each group within each case study presents enough detail about the participants to inform the analysis.

5.2 PRESENTING CASE-STUDY RESULTS:
DISTINCTIVE VOICES AND COMMON THREADS

The following results are presented in terms of *distinctive themes* and *common threads*, highlighted via in-case and cross-case analysis. In-case analysis seeks to build a coherent picture of an issue as it is described, discussed and perceived from a particular perspective by a group of research participants. This analysis often emerges much like a 'story' with a distinctive 'theme', or group of related themes. For example, in Group V2, awareness raising that violence against women is a crime emerges as the key preventative measure that must be developed, and this theme runs throughout their research process. The key criterion for choosing a specific theme from among the many embedded in the case study is 'opportunity to learn' – what does this theme illustrate and how can it deepen our understanding of some particular aspect of the broader issue in question?

Cross-case analysis builds on the distinctive themes that emerge across cases, seeking commonality and divergence.

5.3 "THE HEART THAT BITES…"[18]

5.3.1   Group V1: Background information

Participants in this group described themselves as women who were fortunate to have participated in a range of educational courses – personal and community development, counselling, leadership and women's studies courses.

5.3.2   Case-study theme

A distinctive double-edged theme emerged from this case study. There is a powerfully articulated awareness that the social, cultural, political and judicial systems and structures that women experiencing violence live with, and within, are patriarchal and require radical transformation. Linked closely to this is the awareness that an 'add-women-and-stir' approach to reinventing these structures and systems is not adequate; they must be fundamentally re-ordered from the base up. Improvements to the practical supports and services intended to assist women experiencing violence need to be infused with emotional support, something which is critically absent in this group's memory and experience. One woman described how her current experience of emotional, mental and physical violence was:

"…a continuation of [a] childhood of emotional violence – that was the system… there was no help there – you learn to suppress your own emotions, it's what you learn…"

Suppressing their own emotions also included suppressing the clear and certain knowledge that violence against women is wrong, and they suggest a consistent advertising campaign to combat it:

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[18] During the research sessions, participants in Group VI used the twin symbols of a plastic heart and an 'I Love You' card to express the painful reality of experiencing violence within intimate relationships. The facilitator's notes identify the plastic heart as 'a heart that bites', and we have received their permission to use this term.

"…needs to be put out there – WHY ARE WE ASHAMED – it needs to be like public advertising against smoking."

The undeserved shame women feel because they are trapped in a violent situation is rooted in the sadness of being the partners, wives, lovers, mothers, daughters and sisters of those who act violently against them. Women have allied themselves with 'hearts that bite', and find themselves locked into situations of abuse. They are afraid that if they tell the truth they will not be believed. The shame they carry prevents them from turning to family, although family is presented in the matrix as a crucial support. This echoes the ambivalence that emerges across the four case study groups regarding disclosure to family members. Sometimes it is easier to go to a stranger, or, if a woman is fortunate, she may have a friend who will believe her:

"Friend as support…an outsider couldn't take sides, maybe gone through [the] experience themselves, not as embarrassed with your feelings, a friend would believe you, a true friend."

Participants who have the courage to take offenders to court often find that they themselves are treated as 'problems' by personnel within the legal, medical and social services:

"…even my husband [whom she had taken to court] was shocked at the way the judge spoke to me…it was humiliating the way I was treated…"

The women expressed anger and pain at the injustices they experienced, especially at the hands of the judiciary:

"Women are being put into this [court/judiciary] system and treated like in Rome the [way the] Christians were thrown to the lions."

Participants clearly identify additional problems of structured and institutionalised gender inequality, and the collusion of male figures in positions of power and authority who are unsympathetic to women experiencing violence:

"The courts are sending a message it's all right to beat up wife…men support each other – they empathize with each other – if you break a barring order it is not a criminal offence, the man is let out of the Garda car at the end of the road and can come home – there is no clear message to men…"

Following their gender analysis of the situation, the group suggested that changes need to be made at various levels – for example, practical changes like more women judges, Gardaí and doctors who understand women's experiences of violence and their resulting needs, and support after court cases for survivors of abuse. They stressed that attitudes must change, and see education, specialised training and public awareness campaigns as the way forward. They recognise that:

"The support needs to be emotional and medicaland financial…"

Participants recognised that rebuilding the system from the ground up, and providing the training and resources necessary to ensure that practical assistance becomes infused with emotional support, will not happen overnight. Therefore, they ranked 'Quick response from the Gardaí as the most crucial support, but insisted that this is a short-term support and must be augmented by ongoing education and training of professionals dealing with violence against women. This, in turn, must be supported by public awareness-raising programmes for women, men and children, alongside school-based programmes of a similar nature. The group insisted that education and training are important both in the short and long-term, as ultimately they serve a preventative function. The key is to change social attitudes and atmospheres that enable the continuation of violence against women.

5.4 BREAK THE SILENCE – AWARENESS RAISING IS CRUCIAL

5.4.1 Group V2: Background information
Group V2 described themselves as a mixture of professional and non-professional women, from a range of religious denominations. The group included single mothers, separated, married and widowed women. Participants came from both urban and rural communities.

5.4.2 Case-study theme
The distinctive theme that emerged from this group's results was that violence against women must be perceived as a crime and the most effective way to achieve this is to raise public awareness. On the matrix, participants identified 14 different types of support currently available in their communities. The most effective support, ' A Listening Ear', was awarded 1,594 points. In stark contrast, 'Domestic Violence Awareness Raising', attracted the lowest score, 60 points, indicating it was an almost non-existent support. The group then brought 'awareness raising' to the fore in the next technique:

"Awareness raising was the first bundle to emerge [in the Card Sort] as all felt that this was the most important way to make people aware that it [violence against women] is a crime and a cycle that has to be broken."

The group stressed that until awareness raising succeeds in having violence against women perceived openly and publicly as a crime, women cannot hope for non-judgemental listening and support. The counsellor/therapist was identified as the source most likely to provide 'a listening ear'. Family, friends and neighbours follow as key supports, while other important 'listeners', like religious and Gardaí, are considered well-intentioned but limited in their effectiveness by inadequate knowledge and uncoordinated service-provision:

"The local clergyman is quite often the first person the woman goes to [for] advice and support. This advice, while plentiful, might not always be correct. It was felt that the religious should have adequate training…"

"…there is a good response from the Gardaí locally, but the court system does not provide the additional support needed to punish the perpetrator or recognise his action as a crime."

This links directly with the group's insistence on the need for specialised training for all professionals dealing with violence against women:

"…most of the local agencies needed to be trained in understanding domestic violence, but particularly the judiciary and the solicitors."

This emphasis on an inadequately trained judiciary emerged again when participants created an additional card: *'specific training for the judiciary dealing with family law'* and added it to the pre-prepared pack because:

"In our local court it is difficult to obtain a barring order. The local judge in his wisdom tries his best to keep the 'family' intact, usually requests the perpetrator to stop drinking and assures the victim that this will solve the problem."

This minimising of the danger women may find themselves in is exacerbated by a similar range of inadequate responses from other public services specifically set up to protect and assist women in financial, legal and medical matters. The difficulties associated with getting assistance from the community welfare officer in times of crisis could actually have serious implications for a woman's safety:

"…financial help is given reluctantly. This could result in a woman deciding to stay in an abusive relationship and remain dependent on her partner rather than go through the gruelling given by the local community welfare officer."

Danger occurs in many guises:

"Some of the participants had experienced trying to access the free legal aid service in the town… initial contact is through an intercom system on the door which is on the main street, with no protection from the rain, and the client in full public view until they can access the building…the service is no longer free – it is now means-tested."

Injured women may find it difficult to be believed:

"The [hospital] staff are not trained to recognise abuse or act on suspicions they have about presenting injuries."[19]

This litany of inadequate responses to the basic needs of women experiencing violence is acknowledged by the group's analysis of the current situation. In the absence of what they believe is required, they are forced to fall back to a defensive position. They decided the most important response to have available was 'Quick response and action from the Gardaí.[20] However, they remain clear in their analysis of interconnected needs that require immediate attention:

"If there was an adequate awareness of the crime, training for the various services involved and an inter-agency approach, the perpetrator might realise that this is a crime he will not get away with. But the goal for the future has to be education and self-awareness in schools so that children are aware that violence in any form is unacceptable."

This goal was developed in the timeline produced by the group. The timeline shows a consistent need for a public awareness campaign from now until 2010, backed up by teams of inter-agency personnel trained to deal specifically with women's needs, and ongoing education and empowerment of women at local level.

5.5 DIFFERENT AND EQUAL

5.5.1   Group V3: Background information
Group V3 was a group of Traveller women with whom the facilitators had previous contact through a centre that fosters a broad equality agenda. The research took place at the centre, where participants were involved in an adult education course.

5.5.2   Case study theme
The distinctive theme that emerged in this group was the need to respond appropriately to the diverse needs of different groups of women surviving violence. This is a group of Traveller women who bring their consciousness of diversity to our attention. They are aware that their culture is rarely represented or respected in general social discourse and interaction. When it comes to the issue of violence against women, they experience overlapping discriminations:

"Women needed to feel not discriminated against, for example, there is no representation of Travellers in the refuge. [One] woman said she would not be bothered by lack of cultural representation at first but maybe after a couple of days would look around and start to think about it… Traveller women can feel isolated among all settled women…"

This isolation is intensified when Traveller women seek assistance and support. For example, information is a key support, but may be inaccessible to Traveller women because of the nature of the media employed, which may only suit certain literacy levels:

"Information should be geared towards women who cannot read and write… M_____ made the point that posters for Traveller women should have symbols and images that Travellers will recognise."

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[19] It should be noted that this is the perception of this particular group; women NGOs on Violence against Women have been lobbying for all these recommendations and have been struggling to deliver services and training to women and expertise to policy fora for the past 30 years. What emerges from this component of the Millennium Project is that many women do not have access to or information about these services due to the lack of adequate funding to NGOs.

[20] This decision is echoed by Group VI.

The Health Centre was named as a good source of support, but ***"What if you couldn't read the leaflet?"***

Places where information is available and sources who can provide it are few and far between and hit-and-miss in nature:

"Nurses in hospitals might give you legal information – especially if trained and if Traveller women asked. If you got the right nurse they will ask you questions to help you out. If you are looking for help, it is there. If you want to go home, that is your own business."

"GPs might go and get information for [a] woman. But not them all. I wouldn't ask my doctor – most likely to talk to [my] best friend."

Friends/family emerge as the strongest support overall in the matrix, and are presented as able to provide 'Someone to talk to/Comfort/Trust/Hope', 'Money' and 'Transport'. However, friends/family can only offer minimal help in terms of providing information:

"Most friends and family couldn't give you information, but you might have a settled woman friend who could put you on the right track."

There is also ambivalence about family/friends as a general source of support. Traveller women have few options if family cannot or will not support them. The refuge (scored second-highest) is the next step, but the perceived lack of appropriate responses to Traveller culture reduces the effectiveness of this important source of support. Participants pointed out that refuge accommodation rarely suits their specific life circumstances, particularly in relation to bringing older boys or more than five children to the refuge.

It was suggested that specialised training for refuge personnel, among other services, must cover issues of ethnicity and cultural diversity:

"C_____ refuge which she had visited didn't know a lot about Traveller culture. Group felt that all services that work specifically on domestic violence need training."

Besides the refuges, Traveller women appear to have few options when they need assistance – the services mentioned by Groups V1 and V2 – medical, legal, financial – are even more inaccessible to them because of cultural and literacy issues:

"Traveller women do not know where they can get a barring order – they do not know they don't have to read or write to get an order."

Participants fear and mistrust many services and have an acute awareness that the systems cannot adequately protect them, even when they succeed in accessing them:

"Gardaí can be helpful, but sometimes not…social workers sometimes have information, but there is a lot of fear about them. I wouldn't trust court, ah no, that's where you go to get a barring order. Few Traveller women get barring orders – too much pressure to let them drop…"

Participants also emphasised the need for specialised training for the judiciary, echoing other research groups:

"Judges not knowing how to respond to abused women…[there should be] specialised training for judges and service providers about Traveller issues."

The group stressed that services need to be adapted to Traveller women's needs. For example, social welfare systems need to be more flexible to allow women to access payments independently of their male partners/spouses and many services could usefully employ Traveller women volunteers and employees with a view to reducing the racism encountered by Travellers.

Overall, the theme that emerges in this case study is that of exclusion based on socio-cultural difference. Participants often made links between themselves and the experiences of refugee women or women with

disabilities, indicating a clear awareness about the issue of diversity not only on their own behalf but on behalf of other groups of women in Irish society.

5.6 GROUP V4 - JOURNEYS TOWARDS SAFETY

5.6.1 Background information:
Group V4 described themselves as 'women whose combined experience covered every form of abuse'. They came from rural and urban locations and 'all strata of society'. The research took place in an education centre attached to a refuge from which all had sought either residential sanctuary or outreach services at some time. The facilitator notes that "the participants are almost all on an innovative CE scheme …part of the criteria for which is that they are at least three months out of an abusive relationship – some would be much longer out".

5.6.2 Case-study theme
This group is distinguished from the others primarily in terms of a common context shared by all participants – they have moved beyond an abusive adult relationship, and towards safety and security. From this perspective, Group V4 affirms much of what the previous three groups have illustrated in terms of the need for radical transformation of an unjust patriarchal system which oppresses women in both subtle and overt ways, awareness raising that violence against women is a crime and the need to respect and understand diversity.

All 13 participants could be described as economically insecure and educationally disadvantaged. None completed secondary school during adolescence. Several were sent to 'special schools', which one woman described as 'a cruel place' where she learned nothing at all. These women have had all the odds stacked against them, yet they have survived and managed to extricate themselves from violent relationships. What helped them to do so? What services and supports were available when they needed them?

The facilitator noted that during the matrix exercise, it was considered "important to acknowledge as many supports as possible and the sources, as each woman's road to where she is now is completely different". The matrix, therefore, was a reflective exercise which provides some insight about aspects of making the journey towards safety and security, particularly with regard to the types of resources these participants felt they needed and how effectively these were provided at local level.

The matrix identifies 15 types of support (formal and informal) available in the locality, and 23 sources from which these supports came. The 15 supports outlined below reflect a range of social, emotional and financial needs and services participants accessed. They are presented in the exact language used by participants and in the order presented on the original matrix chart[21]:

1. Someone to talk to
2. To be able to trust someone
3. Money
4. Financial advice
5. Transport
6. Somewhere to go
7. Food
8. Protection
9. Clothes for self
10. Clothes for children
11. Childcare
12. Time for yourself
13. Medical care
14. Information
15. Understanding

Strong correlations emerged, most easily represented as falling into three 'bands' of high, middle and low scores. 'Refuge', 'Family' and 'Good friends' fall into the high scoring band. 'Refuge' is presented as the

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[21] This is not a ranked order.

most important source of support, especially in terms of understanding, a place to go, clothes for women and trust. The next highest source of support was 'Family' which provided clothes, food and money. 'Good friends' were effective sources of childcare, clothes for children, trust and a place to go. Then we see a significant drop in the score levels and within the middle band we find 'Doctor', 'Gardaí' and 'Social worker' – the doctor provided predominantly medical care but also understanding and someone to talk to. The gardaí provided protection, transport and information, and at a reduced level, trust. The social worker provided mainly transport, information, food and someone to talk to.

The remaining sources of support identified by this group were the Citizens' Advice Centre, the Health Board, Health Nurse, Social Welfare, Court clerk, Priest, Hospital, St. Vincent de Paul, Samaritans, the local shop, a second-hand shop, money advice bureau, credit union, bank, money lender, taxi and neighbours. These sources of support fell into the low band of scores; nevertheless, each one makes it onto the matrix as a source providing some type or combination of supports participants needed and accessed.

The group's emic analysis of the matrix (contained in observation notes) concentrates on the fact that, while all the supports mentioned were seen as important and necessary, 'Time for Yourself' was "identified as a crucial support - time to be with self to think things through." However, participants could not award it a single point, because:

"no-one in the group felt there was anyone they could go to to get time for themselves, unless it was for specific reasons, varying from appointments to night out. Some in group felt sisters of friends would offer to take children to give a break. The offer would usually be gladly accepted but never the favour asked."

Even the poignancy of the comment – 'never the favour asked' –suggests that participants have been deprived of a sense of having a right to the fundamental human need for reflection and contemplation, the quiet space within each woman where she encounters her deepest strengths and capacities for pro-activity.

5.7 COMMON THREADS – A VISION OF A VIOLENCE-FREE SOCIETY

Combining data drawn primarily from the timelines[22] and augmented by card sorts, matrices and observation notes allows us some insight into participants holistic image of a society where men, women and children no longer suffer from the crime or effects of violence against women. This requires a 'new value system' and radical changes in social attitudes that contribute to a social environment where diversity is respected and there is full public awareness that violence against women is a crime which diminishes the woman, the perpetrator and the community. In this environment 'everyone has the right to a safe passage through life'.

In concrete terms, four interlinked requirements are fundamental to making this vision into a reality:
• adequate funding (from Government and other sources) to provide a range of services and supports and ensure sensitive implementation at ground level;

• a complete revision from the ground up of the judiciary and court system dealing with violence against women, involving consultation and participation by women;

• inter-agency approaches and inter-agency teamwork designed to provide an immediate appropriate response and a long-term planned response;

• pro-active responsible behaviour and actions on the part of women, men and community groups.

The services, supports and behaviour/actions can be grouped under several general headings and are presented below in the language used by the participants. We should note that some of the suggestions made require further thought, research or development; in other cases, services may already exist, for example, 'free phone helpline', but are obviously unknown to these participants and possibly many other women.

Education & Training:

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[22] Each timeline provides insights in its own right, and this short report cannot do them full justice.

- A clear public message that violence against women is wrong*[23]
- Public information in public places*/Public awareness campaigns that violence against women is a crime
- Revision of the current education system - holistic education for children with less emphasis on exams and more on social responsibility, healthy relationships and equality issues (gender, ethnicity, ability, class, etc.)
- A national programme of personal development for children
- Education programmes for boys in schools to prevent violence and raise awareness*
- Awareness-raising for girls in school about violence against women*
- Anti-racist training and education regarding the needs of women experiencing violence aimed at judges, gardaí and service providers
- Training GPs to provide a supportive and practical response to women experiencing violence.*

Counselling, treatment and local & national support services:
- Local women running local centres in every housing estate operating from a feminist perspective to cater to the needs of women experiencing violence, with focus on affordable childcare, education and spirituality
- Refuge*
- Quick response and action from Gardaí
- Free counselling and rehabilitation services (available readily in the community); support and advocacy services*
- Mandatory programmes for perpetrators linked to sanctions within the criminal justice system
- Neighbourhood watches increased
- Recruitment drive for more women Gardaí
- Free phone helpline
- All services and supports should be sensitive to cultural diversity

Employment, financial and life conditions:
- Financial support for women experiencing violence*
- Job sharing
- Emphasis on people, not profit, in the workplace
- Dole payments increased
- Increasing social and work opportunities for women…all of these leading to the ideal of full employment for all and good quality housing.

Social, relational and political:
- Public outcry at numbers of women being murdered and maimed due to domestic violence
- More caring from community groups
- Women becoming increasingly active in politics at local and national level
- Men need to be involved in building towards this new society
- Women engaging in leadership/ women empowering themselves
- Men take responsibility for their actions
- Parents share childcare responsibilities
- Good support from family and friends*

Drawn from the diverse perspectives of the 43 participants in this study, these are the main elements considered necessary to fulfil their vision of a society free of violence towards women.

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[23] All four groups retained all ten pre-prepared cards and included them in the subsequent Timeline exercises. They are designated in these listings by an asterisk to distinguish them from emic data generated by participants.

6. DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

The NWCI Millennium Project embraces the fact that the formulation of policy statements and the implementation and provision of services 'on the ground' is becoming increasingly complex and dynamic in the Republic of Ireland. While it is relatively easy to access policy documentation to establish the view from the policy-maker's perspective, it is less easy to access the view 'from the ground'. In this respect, qualitative research approaches and methods that are participatory in nature, that explore and present the grassroots view, can serve to strengthen the relationship between policy makers, service-providers and service-users.

The following discussion of the research results attempts to draw together, in an integrated manner, the very different 'voices' emerging from each of the four participating groups. The first group deals with structured gender inequality and articulates a key perspective on violence against women in intimate relationships which is then elaborated in distinctive ways by the remaining three groups. All four groups engaged in the same research design and process, and the uniqueness of each 'voice' is a testament to the diverse insights of participants and facilitators.

6.1 OVERVIEW

The international and European literature reviewed supports the view that analysis of structured gender inequality acts as a corrective to the pathologising of women, which constructs women as 'the problem' and obscures the responsibility of the perpetrator. This analysis at international level has succeeded in moving women's rights somewhat closer to the centre of the human rights agenda, but not without a struggle. At local level, when women engage in analysis of structured gender inequality, they develop a view of a 'bigger picture' of structured and institutionalised violence against women, and this assists them in the task of shifting the burden of blame from their own undeserving shoulders to its rightful location: the perpetrator.

This creates space for women to develop more positive self-images and begin to see themselves as part of the solution. However, these important developments mean breaking the silence and this cannot be achieved safely without support from the State and the community. Much can be achieved – women can begin to reconstruct their lives and the lives of their children – when these supports, or even some of them, are in place and accessible to women experiencing violence. Women are thus enabled to move from being survivors to becoming survivors who become powerful actors in the social domain.

6.2 A SYSTEM WITH A LISTENING HEART?

Our first group offers a powerful evocation of the emotional landscape underlying women's experiences of violence in intimate relationships. Women consistently find that they are caught between the intimate pain of 'the heart that bites' and the social exclusion of a system that seems to have no heart. The very system to which they turn for protection often serves to exacerbate the situation by virtue of its gender-blind structural and institutional operations. A worrying picture emerges of women being disbelieved, their needs grudgingly met, their attempts to access help frustrated by a lack of political will and organisation.

Analysing the social, political, cultural and judicial systems they live with, and within, leads participants to suggest that nothing less than a radical transformation of its patriarchal structures will do. As women who experience violence, they are cast as 'the problem' at social, judicial and interpersonal levels and "made to feel ashamed" at the same time as they fear for their lives, sanity or health, or that of their children.

The judiciary is the area where participants experienced the most devastating humiliation and disempowerment; this is further compounded by inadequate support from other services. The system of protection and support, as participants experience it, lacks a listening heart and a sympathetic mind; their experiences of violence are trivialised, their danger minimised, their anxieties dismissed. This legal/judicial system requires "fundamental revision" and re-construction from the ground up; it needs to be "infused with emotional support" for women who experience violence and it needs to involve them in consultation and participation in the process of re-construction.

Just as women's rights have been marginalised within the human rights movement, participants perceive their rights as marginalised by the society and communities in which they live. They are not defeated, however. They resist the image of woman as victim and choose to re-present themselves as survivors. They refuse to collude in the act of casting themselves or each other as 'problems' – instead, they confidently present their insights and experiences as central to devising better solutions to the problems they know from the inside out. The very act of engaging in an analysis of structured gendered inequality enables women to make the move from the personal to the political, from: *"Why is this happening to me? What have I done to deserve it?" to: "Aha! I can see the bigger picture here. This is beginning to make sense. I'm not to blame."*

This act of enquiry and analysis also encourages a critique of intimate relationships in which violence occurs. This is difficult, dangerous and painful territory to explore. We should not underestimate the deep pain this brings to women as they face the facts about the 'heart that bites'. Every possible support and encouragement should be made available.

6.2.1   Women discovering their power and potential
Our literature review acknowledged the long-held feminist consciousness that unequal power relations disempower women. This power dynamic is at the heart of the issue of violence against women: who has power, how it is wielded, whether it is power exercised as 'power over another' or 'power shared' for mutual benefit. Reflecting on this in small local groups where safety and confidentiality is assured allows women the time and space to uncover their own power, and it is this quiet and almost hidden story that is perhaps most inspiring. Women begin to realise that they actually possess power, that they have a voice and their perspective counts. Their 'place', whether considered marginal by others, is a 'centre' as far as they are concerned and from that centre they can speak with a certain authority. Women begin to realise that they have the right and the capacity to help to engender the kind of changes they know are necessary to eliminate violence against women.

6.2.2   Exercising power in solidarity
The key to the development of this power for positive change is exercising it in social space - in solidarity. In an ideal world, non-judgemental responses across the board to women who disclose experiences of violence would provide this solidarity and women could readily move towards exercising their power. Unfortunately, participants in this study indicate that non-judgemental support has rarely been available to them. Instead, they have had to resist the accusation that they are 'the problem', rebuild the damaged sense of self-esteem this accusation causes and then struggle to take the power to identify themselves as part of the solution, all the while striving for safety and security in their lives. Given this harsh reality, assistance in the form of support from local support groups for women experiencing violence, community development initiatives, service-providers, advocates, policy-makers and representatives of government departments which enable women to exercise power in solidarity is central to positive change at local and national level.

6.3 ONGOING ADAPTIVE ANALYSIS AND
RECONSTITUTION OF SYSTEMS AND LIVES
The analysis and critique of structured gender inequality must, of necessity, be an ongoing adaptive process, sensitive to changes in socio-cultural systems and attuned to the perspectives of women themselves. We need to be informed by women at local level about new ways in which violence erupts and new ways in which violence against women is perpetrated. This is the only way in which international and national law, policy and strategy can keep pace with these changes in order to develop appropriate policies, and provide effective supports and services.

Our results indicate that women at local level are not only capable of, but are deeply engaged in, such analysis. Community education initiatives and programmes within refuge centres are supporting this process. As Toro says, effective policy is grounded in women's everyday experiences of violence. We need to develop better mechanisms for accessing, understanding and incorporating the insights resulting from these experiences into community-based responses and particularly into government level policy-making and implementation processes. If would seem that if the 'system' proves willing to develop a listening heart, women are prepared to speak.

6.3.1   Breaking the silence – whose task?

Speaking out about violence against women in close adult relationships implies breaking the silence that surrounds the issue. Silence has ensured that we enter the third Millennium without the necessary body of laws, sanctions, supports and services to deal with this area of serious crime. Who is responsible for speaking out? Who should be trying to break the silence? Women experiencing violence are the least empowered and most endangered in doing so, yet society has in the main left it to women's organisations, feminists, activists and survivors to speak out. Colm O'Connor suggests that the institutions, judicial system, agencies, health-care professionals and the community are all witnesses to the 'event'. As witnesses, we are generally silent, colluding by remaining uninvolved and "creating a high tolerance threshold that allows [the violence] to perpetuate" (Cork Domestic Violence Project, 1998).

"All the women thought that if violence was socially unacceptable it would be much easier to take action when it occurred."

Our collusion depends, as noted in the literature review, on our support of the false dualism between 'private' and 'public' spheres. We maintain our silence because we have not yet been persuaded of our responsibility as witnesses to come forward, to speak out. We resist the notion that the community and the State ought to be active responsible witnesses who will 'interfere' and call the perpetrators to account. We do not like to think that we ourselves might be accountable at some level.

6.3.2   Changing attitudes and behaviour – reconstituting the system
The central emphasis on public awareness raising campaigns and education for the judiciary, community and service providers points to the fact that the participants, who are the survivors, have learned the hard way that we are not aware of their struggles and rights. They are offering a critique to the system, but in speaking of the system, there is always the danger that we forget that people, ordinary individuals, we ourselves, constitute the system. Therefore, we are a legitimate target for their expert opinion. Given this, participants advise that our education should be seen as having both a short- and long-term aim.

In the short term, adequate funding and effective implementation policies are required for media advertisement and bombardment campaigns to give a clear public message that violence against women is a crime - this will help to make us aware of the nature and extent of the violence many women live with. Participants recommend specialised training for the judiciary and the inter-agency teams organised as outlined in the recommendations of the Government's Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women (1997).

In the long term, adequate funding and effective implementation policies are required for education, which is seen as a preventative measure. School programmes would help to incorporate awareness about violence against women into the social conscience of upcoming generations.

However, the vision generated by these participants does not end here. They want children to learn that all forms of violence are wrong and constitute unacceptable behaviour, including violence against men and children and all forms of racism and social exclusion. They would also like to see the development of an awareness that systems and structures can be violent, including the current education system, and, without doubt, the judiciary as they have experienced it.

6.3.3   Women as part of the solution
It is instructive that the participants extend an invitation to all members of the community, the services and the State to collude in a new way – to collapse the false division between private and public and make violence against women a completely unacceptable behaviour at every level. They themselves are doing their part:

"The new Women's Support Centre which has just appeared in the town to specifically provide information and support to women experiencing domestic violence will provide a much-needed service locally and raise awareness throughout the county that violence against women is a crime, a crime that should be punished. It is envisaged that working in co-ordination with [this service][24] a woman will be empowered to determine her future."

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[24] Name of centre deleted for reasons of confidentiality.

As government and other funding is made available, women at local level are taking initiatives like this, and more women experiencing violence will come forward looking for help and support. We know that there are long-existing services already in place, but they require adequate funding in order to be made available to the increasing numbers of women seeking support. As the Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women points out, a co-operative coherent approach is necessary. We have arrived at the stage where inter-agency co-operation and inter-departmental communication are clearly seen as central to more effective policy implementation. Accurate and swift feedback on the effectiveness of initiatives and services is important. Our findings, limited though they are to four small case studies, suggest that women who have experienced violence have unique perspectives to contribute in this respect, among others, and therefore possess strong partnership potential.

6.4 THE CHALLENGE OF DIVERSITY

The distinct experiences of Traveller women bring additional critical perspectives to bear upon the institutions and their operations. To be a woman under threat of violence is an experience that carries strong social exclusion in the first instance. In addition, Traveller women find themselves excluded because they do not belong to the dominant cultural system. Their almost complete exclusion from access to the legal system, coupled with the inaccessibility of services because of cultural/literacy issues, alerts us to the overlapping discriminations Traveller women experience.[25]

The impact of ethnic identity upon women experiencing violence highlights the fact that all women experiencing violence do not constitute a single unitary category. A wide range of variables (for example, age, economic and social background, ability, educational background, sexual orientation, ethnicity etc.) radically affects the manner in which violence is experienced, managed and survived by women. What is absent is an in-depth understanding of the specific experiences and needs of diverse groups of women with regard to supports and services. Therefore, supports and services, when and where available, will need to be implemented sensitively to take account of this diversity.

To actively resist the social exclusion they experience on so many levels, Traveller women suggest that their visibility would be increased and their profile strengthened if they were to find positions as paid and voluntary workers in refuges and other caring centres. Coupled with this, they could be included as advisors in relation to the sensitive implementation of services and supports. Towards these aims Pavee Point engaged in a two-year NOW project that provided the skills needed to Traveller women to take on work on Violence against Women in their community. There are still Traveller women working in Pavee Point to progress the work begun during this two-year initiative. These are examples of the proactive thinking and willingness of survivors of violence to be included in the task of eliminating violence against women from our communities.

6.5 WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY, WOMEN'S CREATIVITY

The fourth voice we heard is unique in that all the participants have succeeded in accessing a significant measure of safety and support. This fourth group stressed that being with other women who are struggling on the same path is what 'makes the difference'. This reduction of isolation is critical because women are often blamed for 'abandoning' a violent partner, or 'breaking up the family' and they are castigated as women who 'run' rather than validated as women who survive.

When women access safety and support, startling things can happen. These participants have become engaged in literacy, education, computer and childcare courses, video-making and editing. This is further evidence that, given support and particularly an environment in which self-esteem can grow, women can begin to experience their creative potential and utilise capacities previously blocked.

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[25] However, Pavee Point engaged in a two-year NOW project that provided the skills needed to Traveller women so that they could take on work on Violence against Women in their community. There are still Traveller women working in Pavee Point to progress the work begun during this two-year initiative.

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