

1. What is Domestic Violence?



Domestic violence is a major issue for women worldwide and Ireland is no exception. It can be physical, emotional, sexual or financial abuse.

The tactics of domestic violence used by perpetrators are deliberate, controlling and unrelenting. The repetitive nature of the abuse has the effect of wearing a woman down gradually, making her doubt herself, putting her in fear, isolating her from supports such as friends and family and making her feel worthless and degraded.

These are just some examples of disclosures of abuse from our National Freephone Helpline in 2007:

Emotional Abuse:

Threats to kill; threats to hurt or kill the children; physically aggressive behaviour such as punching holes in doors and walls; never calling woman by her own name, only speaking to her in derogatory terms

Physical Abuse:

Strangled until unconscious; beaten to the point of miscarriage while pregnant; stripped naked and beaten; thrown against a wall or door, head bashed against wall; punched where 'it won't show'

Sexual Abuse:

Rape including oral, vaginal and anal; forced into prostitution; coerced re-enactment of pornography;

Financial Abuse:

Being denied access to money, even for household basics; abuser closing all bank accounts to stop the woman leaving; non-payment of maintenance

When a woman reports physical abuse it almost always forms part of a wider pattern where she is also experiencing emotional and psychological abuse. Emotional abuse can have devastating consequences for women. Many women report that this abuse is the most damaging to their self esteem and sense of self and, in some cases, their mental health.

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 5, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

1. What is Domestic Violence?



National statistics show that:

- 1 in 5 Irish women have experienced domestic violence from a current or former intimate partner
- 1 in 7 women in Ireland have experienced **severe** abusive behaviour of a physical, sexual or emotional nature from a partner at some time in their lives. It is estimated that 213,000 women in Ireland have been severely abused by a partner
- 1,952 women were accommodated in refuges in Ireland in 2006
- Almost one quarter (23.6%) of perpetrators of sexual violence against women in Ireland were intimate partners or ex-partners

Abuse always meant to me someone being beaten but now I realise it's much more than that. It can mean sexual abuse and it can mean emotional abuse where your whole self esteem is ripped apart. I was never good enough. I was stupid, fat, ugly. I was inadequate in every way. I was always waiting, waiting for something to happen. I didn't class it as abuse, I blamed myself. It was only after seven years I realised I was an abused woman.

Carrie, 37, Dublin.

He nearly killed me on our wedding night. The abuse continued throughout the six years of marriage: the hitting, the thumping; the sexual abuse, the verbal abuse. One night I was on the phone when he came home. He grabbed the phone off me and called me a whore and a bastard. He took five knives out of his pocket and stood looking at them. He said he was going to finish me off. He walked over to me and sliced two of my fingers, one to the bone. He kicked me, pulled me by the hair on the ground and cracked my chest. There was blood everywhere.

Fiona, 30, Co. Westmeath.