

## 2. Domestic Violence and Female Homicide



**The ultimate human rights violation is being deprived of the right to life. Female homicide is among the most extreme forms of the many kinds of violence carried out on women worldwide.**

Research conducted in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK has found that killing by a partner is the form of homicide which most women are most at risk of. Approximately 70% of murdered women are killed by a current or former spouse or partner. Two thirds of those murdered by intimate partners or ex-partners had been physically abused before they were killed<sup>1</sup>.

The actual and attempted murder of women by their partners is an issue that Women's Aid has been concerned about for a long time. Since the beginning of 1996 we have kept a record of all the women murdered in the Republic of Ireland. The following trends have emerged from analysis of the Women's Aid Female Homicide Media Watch:

- On average, one woman a month is murdered in Ireland
- Women are more likely to be killed in their own homes
- Where the case has been resolved, 1 in 2 women were killed by a partner or ex-partner

In addition, Women's Aid hears disclosures to our National Freephone Helpline of the extremely worrying level of violence used against women including the use of weapons. This type of potentially lethal violence includes:

- Near and attempted strangulation
- Being beaten until unconsciousness
- Being stabbed with a kitchen knife
- Being beaten over the head with a hammer
- Having a gun put to the head and to the heads of children
- Being chased and struck by a car

We also hear of threats by perpetrators to kill women and their children.

<sup>1</sup> Campbell, Jacqueline C, "Prediction of homicide of and by battered women", in Campbell, Jacqueline C, ed., *Assessing Dangerousness: Violence by Sexual Offence, Batterers and Child Abusers*, Sage Publications, London, 1995

*Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.*

Article 3, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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Statistics from the Women's Aid Female Homicide Media Watch show that:

- 146 women have been murdered in the Republic of Ireland since the beginning of 1996
- 92 women (63%) were murdered in their own homes
- Of the 107 resolved cases, 50% of women were murdered by a partner or ex-partner
- In all of the resolved cases, 99% of perpetrators were men

Source: Women's Aid Female Homicide Media Watch.

*Susan\**, who was in her early 30s, was found dead in her home. She had received a number of blows with a heavy instrument to her head after she had asked her abusive husband to leave. She was the mother of two young children. During the trial the court heard that her husband had assaulted Susan in the past and was very controlling. In the run up to her murder, Susan had decided that she wanted do something about the abuse and had consulted a solicitor about taking out a barring order. Her husband received a life term for murder and her children are now in the care of her family.

*Niamh\** was a mother of four children. She was found dead near her home. She had been beaten and strangled to death. Neighbours and friends described her as a beautiful and kind woman. Her husband was later charged with her murder. During his trial it emerged that there had been a history of domestic violence throughout their marriage. Friends and family members spoke of numerous occasions where Niamh was left bruised by her husband's assaults. Her husband denied the murder but he was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment by a unanimous verdict.

\* Names have been changed due to the sensitive nature of these case studies.