

4. Domestic Violence and Human Rights



This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Today, in 2008, women and young girls are subject to many forms of human rights violations solely on the basis of their gender. At least **one out of every three women** around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime, usually by a member of her family or someone she knows¹. In no country in the world are women safe from such human rights abuses.

Violence against women is a violation of a woman's human rights. These rights are:

- The right not to be treated in an inhuman and degrading way
- The right to respect for private and family life including the right to emotional and physical integrity
- The right to life

In Ireland the abuse of women's human rights include: physical assault, emotional abuse and psychological torture, rape, sexual abuse, stalking, trafficking, and sexual harassment. Like all organisations working on the frontline, Women's Aid hears directly from women about the abuse and violence they suffer on a daily basis in their own homes.

In 2007, women disclosed to us that they were:

- Raped
- Forced to have sex with abuser's friends

- Beaten with fists, chairs and other implements
- Imprisoned for days on end
- Denied food
- Deprived of sleep
- Scalded with boiling water

These examples of abusive tactics used by perpetrators of domestic violence can be easily compared with the behaviour of other human rights abusers who target civilians, prisoners and political opponents.

The effects of the abuse on women are significant and wide ranging. These include physical injury, self harm, isolation, lowered self esteem, suicidal feelings and attempted suicide, loss of income or work, homelessness, poor health and death.

¹ Ending Violence against Women, L Heise, M Ellsberg, M Gottemoeller, 1999

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property or other status.

Article 2, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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National Statistics on the abuse of women's human rights in Ireland:

- 11,733 calls were answered by the Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline in 2007
- In 2007, there were 11,374 applications for protective orders under the Domestic Violence Act (1996)
- More than 4 in 10 (42%) women in Ireland have experienced some form of sexual abuse or assault in their lifetime
- In 2007, 1,363 sexual offences were reported to An Garda Síochána. This figure includes 351 rapes and 822 sexual assaults
- By the end of 2006, Ruhama were aware of 200 women trafficked into Ireland for the purposes of prostitution and had assisted 132 of these women. Of the 132 women 73% originated from Eastern Europe, 21% from Africa, 4% from South America and 2% from Asia

My life was stolen from me and it took a lot of time to get it back. I had three children and two miscarriages. From the first beating to the last beating; from the first time he stole a life; from the first time he raped me, it affected me very badly. One night he held me down and raped me. I shouted at him to stop. He used me like a rag doll and he hit me when I moved. It went on for hours. When I thought it was over he said, 'you can sleep now, you bitch'. I tried to get up from the bed and he pulled me down again and anally raped me. He pushed a pillow onto my face so he wouldn't hear me shout. I felt like a prisoner to him.

Amy.

I can remember the first time he hit me. I was head butted and kicked in my body. I could never do anything right for him; it was never good enough. It was like walking on glass when he was around trying to please him. I had no friends, my money was accounted for. He controlled everything. He belittled me to his family. He destroyed the confidence I had, told me I was fat and ugly. He would force sex on me when he wanted because he was my husband and that was his right.

Felicity.