



Women's Aid Briefing Paper on Domestic Violence

23rd June 2010

1. The Women's Aid Annual Statistics Report 2009

- Services provided by Women's Aid in 2009
- Disclosures of abuse to the Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline in 2009
- Launch of Women's Aid updated website: www.womensaid.ie—a lifeline, online.

2. Concerning trends in domestic violence as disclosed to Women's Aid

- The use of technology to abuse women
- Women experiencing domestic violence during pregnancy

3. Amendments to the Civil Partnership Bill

- Amendments to extend eligibility for domestic violence protections now to be considered under the Civil Law Miscellaneous Provisions Bill.

1. The Women's Aid Annual Statistics Report 2009

Services provided by Women's Aid in 2009

- 10,076 National Freephone Helpline calls answered
- 992 Telephone support and advocacy calls
- 452 One to One support visits
- 134 Court Accompaniments

Disclosures of abuse to the Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline in 2009

- **14,613 disclosures of abuse** including 8,629 incidents of emotional abuse, 3,479 incidents of physical abuse, 1,679 reports of financial abuse, and 826 reports of sexual abuse, including 335 incidents of rape.
- **1,814 specific incidents of child abuse and 3,104 additional disclosures** that children were living with domestic violence against their mother. In the majority of these incidents, it is likely that children will have witnessed or heard the abuse of their mother, which in itself constitutes a form of emotional abuse of the child.

Launch of Women's Aid updated website: www.womensaid.ie— a lifeline, online.

The new Women's Aid website is a very informative, modern and user friendly resource for women experiencing domestic violence and their family and friends. The site also promotes and encourages online safety for women. We hope to support thousands of additional women with this updated site.

2. Concerning trends in domestic violence as disclosed to Women's Aid

The use of technology by perpetrators of domestic violence

Disclosures to our Helpline reveal a growing trend in the use of technology by abusive partners to monitor and control women. Many women disclosed that their home and mobile phone calls and texts were monitored, strengthening feelings of being trapped and controlled. Women's use of the internet and social media was also monitored, while some younger women in dating relationships reported being stalked on social networking sites.

Leaving the relationship does not always end abuse, with almost a fifth of women continuing to be abused, stalked and harassed, often by phone. After ending their relationship, women disclosed being bombarded with texts and calls, often containing threats describing in explicit detail how they will be attacked or even killed.



While technology can be used as a tool to control and abuse women, it can also be their lifeline. 89% of calls to our Helpline in 2009 were made from mobile phones and our website received over 39,000 visits in 2009.

Women experiencing domestic violence during pregnancy

Many callers disclosed that they were beaten and raped while they were pregnant, which often resulted in miscarriage. Pregnancy does not offer protection from domestic violence. In fact, international research has found that 25% of women who experience domestic violence are physically assaulted for the first time during pregnancy. The Rotunda Hospital conducted research which found that one in eight women surveyed were being abused during their current pregnancy.

Working to combat domestic violence during pregnancy is a key part of the work of Women's Aid. In 2009, Women's Aid collaborated with the four Dublin maternity hospitals to build safer responses for women and their infant children. This collaboration aims to raise awareness of the nature and prevalence of domestic violence during pregnancy, produce a set of guidelines for mandatory domestic violence screening at maternity hospitals, and provide training in safe responses to domestic violence for maternity hospital staff. The level of commitment and support we have met in the maternity hospitals is highly encouraging. This work will continue to be a priority for Women's Aid in 2010 and beyond.

3. Amendments to the Civil Partnership Bill

1. Women's Aid has been lobbying for a number of years to **extend eligibility for protection of victims of domestic violence** under the Domestic Violence Act. We have been following with great interest the proposed amendments to the Act that had been included in the Civil Partnership Bill.
2. We understand that, unfortunately, most amendments to the Domestic Violence Act could not be progressed under the Civil Partnership Bill.
3. Women's Aid welcomes the progressed amendment, in which civil partners are able to apply for protection orders in the same manner as spouses.
4. However, this does not address the lack of protection for the many cohabitants who do not meet the current strict eligibility requirements and for all dating couples.
5. During the Select Committee Debate, the Minister committed to extend the eligibility for domestic violence orders under the forthcoming Civil Law Miscellaneous Provisions Bill. In this Bill, eligibility for Safety Orders would be extended to all cohabitants, without a minimum cohabitation period, and to parents with a child in common, with no cohabitation requirements whatsoever.
6. We warmly welcome these proposals. However, it is important that former cohabitants are also covered, as separation does not necessarily end violence and, at times, can escalate abuse.
7. We are also anxious to ensure that the definition of cohabitants that will apply to the Domestic Violence Act, as amended by the Civil Law Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, will not create additional barriers to cohabitants seeking Domestic Violence Orders.
8. It is Women's Aid's position that protection from domestic violence should not be contingent on cohabitation and that all victims in married, cohabiting or dating relationships, should have recourse to protection, regardless of the level of commitment in the relationship.
9. Women's Aid hopes that the Civil Law Miscellaneous Provisions Bill will be a step in this direction and we are looking forward to continuing working with you on this issue.