

SARAH BENSON

22nd November 2019

GOOD MORNING AND YOU ARE ALL VERY WELCOME TO TODAY'S SEMINAR AND REPORT LAUNCH.

I WOULD LIKE TO PARTICULARLY ACKNOWLEDGE THE PRESENCE TODAY OF:

- THOSE FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN KILLED.
- THOSE WHO HAVE THEMSELVES SURVIVED DOMESTIC ABUSE
- THE WONDERFUL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORT STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS FROM MANY DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS, WHO ARE RIGHT THERE WORKING ON THE FRONTLINE EVERY DAY
- AND IT IS GREAT TO HAVE SO MANY COLLEAGUES FROM AN GARDA SIOCHANA HERE, WHO ARE ALSO SEEING THE DAILY REALITY OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND HAVE THE DIFFICULT TASK OF INVESTIGATING MURDERS WHEN THEY HAPPEN.
- OUR HARDWORKING INTERPRETERS, FOR WHOM I WILL REALLY TRY TO SPEAK SLOWER THAN MY USUAL BREAK-NECK PACE!

I HAVE TO CONFESS TO SOME DISAPPOINTMENT THAT WE DON'T IN FACT (BASED ON OUR REGISTRATION LIST SO I STAND TO BE CORRECTED) HAVE ANY REPRESENTATIVE OF ANY POLITICAL PARTY HERE TODAY – BUT WE ARE MOVING INTO ELECTION MODE AND I AM SURE THOSE OF US WHO ARE HERE, CAN ENSURE THAT THE ISSUES DISCUSSED THIS MORNING ARE BROUGHT TO OUR POLITICIAN'S ATTENTION WHEN THEY COME KNOCKING ON OUR DOORS, AS MATTERS OF HIGH PRIORITY

TODAY WE LAUNCH THE WOMEN'S AID FEMICIDE REPORT 2019: THIS IS THE ONLY CONTINUOUS ARCHIVE OF WOMEN MURDERED IN IRELAND SINCE 1996. THROUGH THIS PROJECT WE HAVE THE DATA AVAILABLE ON FEMALE HOMICIDE, AND THE **230 WOMEN** WHO HAVE BEEN KILLED IN THIS TIME.

THROUGH THIS OFTEN VERY DIFFICULT WORK, WE ALSO KNOW WHERE WOMEN ARE KILLED, AND WE KNOW HOW AND BY WHOM ACROSS IRELAND.

61% OF WOMEN ARE KILLED IN THEIR OWN HOMES. A PLACE THAT SHOULD BE A SAFE PLACE.

RELATIONSHIP CHART SLIDE

OF THE 180 RESOLVED CASES, 100 KILLERS WERE A PARTNER OR EX-PARTNER OF THE WOMAN. AN ADDITIONAL 57 WOMEN WERE KILLED BY A MAN KNOWN TO THEM. 87% OF WOMEN DIED AT THE HANDS OF A MAN THEY KNEW.

THIS REPORT COMMEMORATES, AND PRESERVES IN PUBLIC MEMORY, THE 230 WOMEN AND THEIR 16 CHILDREN WHO LOST THEIR LIVES VIOLENTLY OVER 24 YEARS IN THIS COUNTRY.

EACH YEAR, WE HAVE THE DIFFICULT TASK OF ADDING MORE AND MORE NAMES TO OUR RECORDS. AND IN THE LAST YEAR ALONE, WE HAVE LOST FIVE MORE WOMEN. THEIR NAMES ARE:

ELZBIETA PIOTROWSKA [ELSBEE ETA PITROVSKA]

JASMINE MCMONAGLE

CATHY WARD

SKAIDRITE VALDGEIMA

VALERIE FRENCH KILROY

SINCE THE LAST FEMICIDE REPORT WE HAVE ALSO SEEN **CONVICTIONS** IN THE CASES OF: NICOLA COLLINS, AMY MCCARTHY, ANASTASIA KRIEGEL – HERSELF ONLY A CHILD – AND IRENE WHITE.

INDEED, WE DEDICATE OUR 2019 REPORT TO ANNE DELCASSIAN, WHO WAS THE SISTER OF IRENE, MURDERED IN HER OWN HOME IN DUNDALK IN APRIL 2005. ANNE DIED OF CANCER, AGED JUST 59, IN AUGUST THIS YEAR - JUST WEEKS AFTER A SECOND MAN WAS SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT FOR THE MURDER OF IRENE. ANNE WAS A CONSTANT CAMPAIGNER WHO NEVER GAVE UP HOPE THAT THE KILLERS OF HER SISTER WOULD BE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE. HER BRAVERY, TENACITY AND PERSEVERANCE IS A POWERFUL LEGACY FOR US ALL.

THIS ANNUAL EVENT SPEAKS NOT JUST TO THIS LOSS OF LIFE BUT TO THE HUGE IMPACT OF THESE DEATHS: REMEMBER THE 131 CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN LEFT WITHOUT MOTHERS; THE MOTHERS, FATHERS, BROTHERS, SISTERS AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS WHO ARE LEFT REELING- A GAPING HOLE IN THEIR LIVES; THE FABRIC OF THE COMMUNITIES THESE 230 WOMEN WERE A PART OF RIPPED ASUNDER.

LIKE A STONE FALLING IN A POOL, THESE ARE RIPPLES WHICH FLOW FROM EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THESE VIOLENT DEATHS. ONE MURDER IS ONE TOO MANY AND OUR WISH IS FOR THE YEAR WHEN THE UPDATED REPORT SHOWS ZERO FURTHER DEATHS.

WE WANT TO MAKE VISIBLE, NOT ONLY THESE NEEDLESS DEATHS, BUT ALSO THE LIVES OF THESE WOMEN, WHO MATTERED SO MUCH TO SO MANY. TO QUANTIFY THEIR LOSS IS IMPOSSIBLE -

BECAUSE THEIR LIVES WERE SO VALUABLE, SO FULL OF POTENTIAL NOW UNREALISED. WE WANT EACH OF THEM TO BE REMEMBERED FOR THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS, THEIR QUALITIES, THEIR HOPES AND DREAMS - NOT JUST THE MANNER IN WHICH ANOTHER PERSON TOOK THESE AWAY FROM THEM.

OUR PRIMARY FOCUS TODAY, WITH AN EXCEPTIONAL PANEL I'M SURE YOU WILL ALL AGREE, IS THE PROSPECT OF A SYSTEM FOR DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEWS IN IRELAND. THIS IS A VERY TIMELY THEME, AS WE ARE POISED TO GATHER THE LEARNING FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS AND REFLECT ON OUR CAPACITY AND COMMITMENT TO DO MORE TO TRY TO PREVENT MURDERS LIKE THESE.

INTIMATE PARTNER MURDER SLIDE

100 women in the femicide watch report were killed by their partner or ex. 14 children were killed alongside their mother and 131 children have lost their mother in domestic homicides.

WE WILL HEAR FROM NORAH GIBBONS REGARDING THE PROGRESS OF THE FAMILICIDE AND DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEW STUDY GROUP THAT SHE IS CURRENTLY LEADING, AND OUR OTHER ESTEEMED SPEAKERS WILL SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE AND LEARNING ALONG WITH THEIR ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IRELAND.

I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE IN PARTICULAR THE COURAGEOUS PARTICIPATION OF RYAN HART, FRANK MULLANE AND KATHLEEN CHADA WHO SPEAK AS EXPERTS FROM EXPERIENCE AND THEIR ADVOCACY, HAVING LOST LOVED ONES - AND TO AGAIN RECOGNISE THE PRESENCE OF OTHER SURVIVORS IN THE ROOM TODAY, TO WHOM WE ALL OWE IT TO STRIVE ALWAYS TO DO BETTER.

BEFORE WE TURN TO THIS IMPORTANT TOPIC OF DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEWS, I ALSO WANT TO REFLECT FOR A MOMENT ON THE OTHER WAYS WE MIGHT FOCUS ON PREVENTION, AS I BELIEVE THAT ACHIEVING OUR ZERO YEAR REQUIRES THAT WE TAKE A MULTI-FACETED APPROACH.

AS I HAVE SAID: ONE DEATH IS ONE TOO MANY, BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE NUMBERS OF DEATHS APPEAR TO BE REDUCING - CERTAINLY IN THE LAST DECADE COMPARED TO THE FIRST DECADE WE RECORDED.

YEAR CHART

HOW DO WE EFFECTIVELY GAUGE CAUSAL FACTORS THOUGH? I DON'T HAVE THAT ANSWER TODAY, BUT I THINK IT IS IMPORTANT NONETHELESS TO REFLECT ON WHAT MIGHT WE ALREADY BE DOING BETTER NOW THAN WE WERE 20 YEARS AGO? WHAT CAN WE TAKE ENCOURAGEMENT FROM? WHAT CAN WE BUILD UPON?

IN RECENT YEARS WE HAVE, AS A SOCIETY, OPENED UP THE PUBLIC DISCUSSION ABOUT DOMESTIC ABUSE MORE, WHICH I HOPE HAS REDUCED THE SERIOUS STIGMA VICTIM SURVIVORS FEEL, AND ENCOURAGED MORE TO SEEK SUPPORT AND SPEAK OUT.

WE NEED TO ENSURE THAT THE SOCIAL CONVERSATION REMAINS CONTINUOUS, SO THAT FAMILIES, FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES, AND EMPLOYERS OF THOSE LIVING WITH ABUSE MIGHT BE BETTER EQUIPPED TO KNOW THE SIGNS AND REACH OUT A HAND TO THOSE SUFFERING

- BUT ALSO TO SAFELY CHALLENGE THE BEHAVIOURS AND ATTITUDES OF PERPETRATORS - WHO ARE, AFTER ALL, SOMEONE'S FAMILY, FRIEND OR COLLEAGUE ALSO.

WE HAVE HAD **REALLY POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN KEY AGENCIES** LIKE AN GARDA SIOCHANA, WITH THEIR RECENTLY UPDATED DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY TO GUIDE THE FORCE IN ACHIEVING EFFECTIVE VICTIM PROTECTION AND PERPETRATOR ACCOUNTABILITY. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN THE CONTINUING ROLL OUT OF THE DIVISIONAL PROTECTIVE SERVICES BUREAUX, OVERSEEN BY THE NATIONAL BUREAU, AND THE NEW DEVELOPMENT BY THIS NATIONAL BUREAU OF A RISK ASSESSMENT TOOL JUST ABOUT TO BE PILOTED. ALL REALLY WELCOME PROGRESS, WHICH WE HOPE WILL BE RESOURCED TO BE ABLE TO REACH ITS POTENTIAL.

IN LAW WE HAVE ALSO HAD PROGRESS, WITH THE EXPANSION OF OUR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEGISLATION TO COVER NON-COHABITING COUPLES AND ALSO COUPLES WHO ARE SEPARATED, BUT WHERE ABUSE CONTINUES POST-SEPARATION. THIS IS OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE TO OFFER POTENTIAL LEGAL PROTECTION TO A MUCH LARGER COHORT OF VICTIMS.

AND WE HAVE THE **RECOGNITION OF COERCIVE CONTROL AS A CRIME** - MOVING US BEYOND THE OUTDATED STEREOTYPE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BEING ASSOCIATED PREDOMINANTLY WITH PHYSICAL VIOLENCE.

IT'S IMPORTANT, I FEEL, TO SET THIS CONTEXT BEFORE WE DELVE INTO THE IMPORTANT POTENTIAL TOOL WHICH ARE DHRS – AS THEY WILL NOT PROVIDE THE SOLUTION ON THEIR OWN, AND WE SHOULD NOT PRESS PAUSE IN OUR OTHER EFFORTS, IN ANTICIPATION OF THEM.

WE IN WOMEN'S AID, AS WELL AS THE OTHER EXCELLENT DOMESTIC ABUSE SUPPORT SERVICES ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE CONTINUALLY STRIVING TO UPSKILL OURSELVES AS LAWS AND POLICIES EVOLVE SO WE CAN SUPPORT VICTIM SURVIVORS WITH THE MOST CURRENT KNOWLEDGE. WE PARTNER WITH THE STATUTORY SERVICES, OTHER THIRD SECTOR AND PRIVATE ORGANISATIONS AND WE COLLABORATE WITH VICTIM SURVIVORS TO LISTEN, LEARN AND PUSH TO GAIN THE MANY OUTSTANDING IMPROVEMENTS TO BOTH THE FAMILY LAW AND CRIMINAL LAW SYSTEMS THAT WE KNOW WE NEED.

GENDER GRAPH

INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDE, LIKE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, IS A GENDERED CRIME. ACCORDING TO A UNODC GLOBAL STUDY ON HOMICIDE, AND GENDER RELATED KILLINGS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS (2018), WHILE MEN ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO BE VICTIMS OF HOMICIDE GENERALLY, WOMEN ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO BE VICTIMS OF FAMILY AND INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDES. OUT OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF GLOBAL VICTIMS OF INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDE IN 2017, ROUGHLY 82% WERE FEMALE VICTIMS WHILE 18% WERE MALE VICTIMS.

THESE FINDINGS SHOW THAT EVEN THOUGH MEN ARE THE PRINCIPAL VICTIMS OF HOMICIDE GLOBALLY, WOMEN CONTINUE TO BEAR THE HEAVIEST BURDEN OF LETHAL VICTIMIZATION AS A RESULT OF GENDER STEREOTYPES AND INEQUALITY. THE INFORMATION AVAILABLE IN THIS REPORT ALSO SHOWS THAT, OTHER THAN GENDER-RELATED KILLINGS IN CONFLICT SETTINGS, GENDER-RELATED KILLINGS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS OUTSIDE THE FAMILY ARE RELATIVELY RARE IN COMPARISON TO KILLINGS PERPETRATED BY INTIMATE PARTNERS OR OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS.

ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR, GENDER AND SEX STEREOTYPES MUST BE ROBUSTLY CHALLENGED; OUR PUBLIC DISCOURSE MUST TAKE CARE WITH LANGUAGE; AND WE MUST NEVER FORGET THE WOMEN, THEIR FAMILIES AND LOVED ONES - FOR WHOM NEW INITIATIVES COME TOO LATE - SO THAT WE UNDERSTAND HOW VITAL OUR COLLECTIVE WORK IS TO ENSURE THAT FUTURE FAMILIES DON'T SUFFER THIS LOSS.

THANK YOU.

[NOTE IF ASKED RE REDUCING RATES OF MURDERS: THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF WOMEN IN THE DECADE 1996-2005 BEING KILLED EACH YEAR WAS 12, WHICH FOR THE MOST RECENT DECADE 2010- 2019 HAS REDUCED TO 7 PER YEAR.]