

# WOMEN'S AID IMPACT REPORT 2016

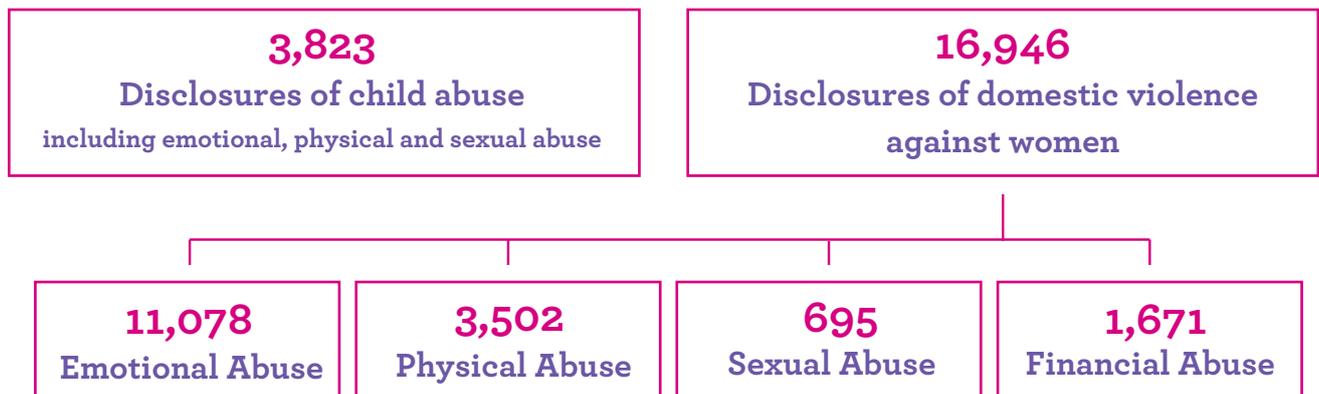


# 2016 IN BRIEF



## 20,769

### DISCLOSURES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & CHILDREN





*Domestic violence doesn't end at 10pm, now neither do we. The Women's Aid 24hr National Freephone Helpline staff and volunteers. (Pic: Sharpix)*

## INTRODUCTION

Last year was an important year for Women's Aid. A year of change. A year of progress as our National Freephone Helpline became a 24 hours 7 days a week service.

The Women's Aid Helpline now responds to many more women every day who are affected by domestic violence. During our new additional overnight opening hours (10pm - 10am), **we responded to an extra 4,910 calls** which in previous years would have gone unanswered.

We know the safest time for many women to call is in the quiet hours of early morning when everyone else is safe and asleep in bed. For them, there is obvious relief in finding someone at the end of the phone to listen, believe and support them. It takes courage to call us and we are committed to being here for every woman who needs us, at any hour of the day or night.

Volunteers are an essential part of our Helpline team and are empathetic, compassionate and active listeners. Last year, they gave **3,372 volunteer hours** to be there for women.

## Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline at 25

For **25 years**, Women's Aid has provided Ireland's only National Freephone Helpline for women experiencing domestic violence. **During that time we have responded to over 282,000 calls.**

When the Helpline started in 1992, Women's Aid understood the need for a safe, confidential and dedicated listening support service to women, which was free and accessible throughout the country. Our Helpline is an ally to women empowering them to make their own decisions and choices. Our staff and volunteers receive specialised, professional training to understand the dynamics of domestic violence, to know about the options and supports needed by women, and to provide high quality and supportive responses to women who call us.

Our 24hr National Freephone Helpline operates to the **highest standards** and is accredited by the Helplines Partnership. Accessibility measures include the **Text Helpline service for deaf and hard of hearing women, and a Telephone Interpretation Service** which allows us to support women in over **170 languages**. We continue to innovate and intend to make our confidential support service accessible online in the near future.

## Listening. Believing. Supporting.

This Impact Report for 2016 is a powerful and moving illustration of the prevalence of domestic violence and its very real and very harmful impact on women and children. Last year, there were **19,115 contacts<sup>1</sup>** with our Direct Services<sup>2</sup> during which **16,946 disclosures<sup>3</sup> of domestic violence against women** were made. We heard **almost 4,000 disclosures of abuse against children**. Without this annual snapshot, the abuse of women by their current or former boyfriends, partners or husbands would largely remain hidden in Irish society.

The report also brings to the fore the essential and trusted role of Women's Aid in supporting the one in five women who are isolated, alone and at risk of domestic violence and dating abuse.

We know how important our presence is for women and the difference our approach makes. The work of Women's Aid is based on the **principles of confidentiality, maximising safety and understanding trauma and supporting women's autonomy**.

We are informed, knowledgeable and are an advocate for women's particular needs. We identify and respond to the additional barriers and discrimination that women experience. We are committed to justice for women and ensuring sanctions against abusive men. **We recognise the best form of child protection in the home is by protecting and supporting women to move from crisis to safety**. At a national and international level, Women's Aid is an effective voice for women, advocating for political and institutional change.

Our work is informed by a shared, feminist understanding of male violence against women. **Our service is woman-centred, our response is evidence-based**. Women's experiences of domestic violence in Ireland, as disclosed to our Direct Services, underpin and inform all of our work to end domestic violence.

For this reason, women trust Women's Aid. One caller to the Helpline summed up our response. She said, *"for the first time in my life I was able to tell someone what was happening. Women's Aid didn't judge me or blame me. They just listened."* Feedback like this continues to inspire us at Women's Aid. Our staff, volunteers and Board of Directors will continue our work to stop domestic violence against women and children in Ireland.

### Margaret Martin, Director

May 2017.



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- 1 *Important note on data collection: Quantitative Data for calls to the National Helpline is captured on our telecommunications system, SpliceCom, and all other data is recorded manually on our in house database. The sample available is denoted by n= throughout the report. The information collected relates to details and facts disclosed by women in the process of their contact with Women's Aid. As the primary aim of our services is to provide confidential support and information to women, Women's Aid does not solicit information for statistical purposes. For this reason, only partial information is available to us on the majority of women, particularly in relation to the extent of the abuse being experienced and the barriers to seeking help. The value of statistics is that they build a picture of women's experiences and of their need for protection and support.*
  - 2 *The Women's Aid Direct Services include: the 24hr National Freephone Helpline, One to One Support Service, Court Accompaniment Service and the Dolphin House Support and Referral Service (run in partnership with Inchicore Outreach Centre and Dublin 12 Domestic Violence Service).*
  - 3 *A 'disclosure' of abuse refers to the specific incident spoken about during our contact with women. There may be overlapping types of abuse and incidents referred to by a woman in any one contact. This should not be taken to mean the number of calls or number of women supported by Women's Aid in 2016.*

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DISCLOSED TO WOMEN'S AID IN 2016

## 11,078 DISCLOSURES OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse disclosed in 2016 included being stalked, both physically and online, being isolated from family and friends, being put down constantly and death threats against women and children. Abusive men are very manipulative and let women know what they are capable of while maintaining a level of respectability to the outside world. Even where there is no actual physical or sexual abuse, there is the threat and fear of it. These threats are brutal, detailed and very frightening. Many women speak about the pain of emotional abuse and how it can be even more damaging than the other forms of abuse they experience. It is often hard for women to name the abuse and for others to understand the nature and impact of emotional abuse.

## 3,502 DISCLOSURES OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical assault within a relationship is a serious crime. Some women are assaulted regularly while for other women there is no way of knowing when the next attack will come. In 2016, physical abuse disclosed included women being hit, beaten with weapons and everyday objects, stabbed and cut with knives, slapped, being bitten, being strangled, including to the point of losing consciousness. Women disclosed that they were beaten, strangled and kicked while they were pregnant.

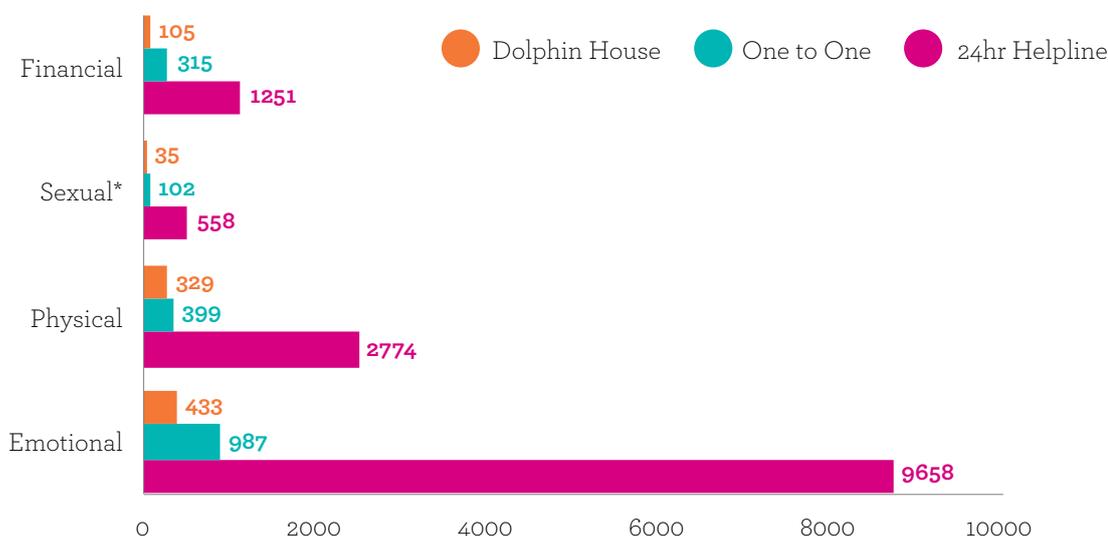
## 695 DISCLOSURES OF SEXUAL ABUSE

There were 695 disclosures of sexual abuse in 2016. This figure includes 316 reports of rape by a current or ex intimate partner. Women disclosed that they were raped, beaten during sex, coerced into sex, were denied access to family planning, had sexually explicit images and videos made without their consent, sometimes being shared online. Many women find it difficult to talk about sexual abuse by their intimate partners. Some find it difficult to identify coercion and forced sexual activity as the crime of sexual violence and rape. But sexual violence, even in an intimate relationship or by an ex-partner, is a crime.

## 1,671 DISCLOSURES OF FINANCIAL ABUSE

Financial abuse continues to be an issue for women with 1,671 disclosures in 2016. It is one of the most effective ways that abusive men control, isolate and trap the women they are hurting. By limiting a woman's access to financial resources, the abuser ensures that she is forced to choose between staying in an abusive relationship or face poverty. Women disclosed that they were being denied access to family income, that their salaries/social welfare payments were being controlled, that their partners were running up debt in their name. Financial abuse often continues after separation through the hiding of family assets and not paying child maintenance.

Chart 1: 16,946 disclosures of abuse against women in contacts with Direct Services.

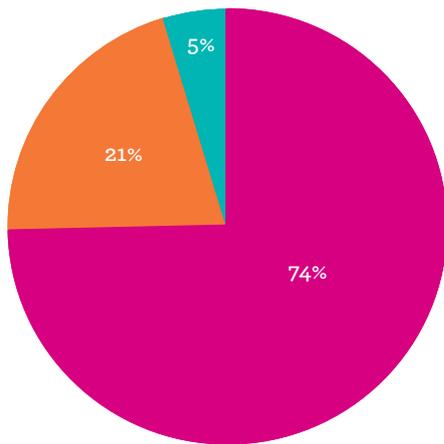


\*Sexual abuse includes 316 disclosures of rape within relationships. (n=14,388)

## WHO WE SUPPORTED IN 2016

The Women's Aid 24hr National Freephone Helpline is a support service for **women experiencing emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse by a current or former husband, partner or boyfriend**. We also support family members, friends and professionals concerned about women living with domestic violence. In 2016, the majority of calls to the Helpline were support calls (74%).

Chart 2: Types of calls responded to by the 24hr National Freephone Helpline.



(n=12,989)

● Support (Including Silent)	74%
● Hang up/Hoax	21%
● Indirect Support & Admin	5%

**96% of callers** to the Women's Aid 24hr National Freephone Helpline **were women**. 4% were men.

**31% of callers** were in **Dublin**, **29%** of callers said they were **outside Dublin**. **40% of callers** did not say where they lived.

We also responded to **267 Helpline emails** and **56 initial Helpline contacts via social media** in 2016.

We supported **484 women in 748 one to one support visits**. **Attended Court 240 times with 133 women** and we saw **387 women during 411 drop-in visits** at Dolphin House.

## IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON WOMEN

The mental and physical effects of domestic violence on a woman's health and well-being are significant, immediate and long-term and wide-ranging. The ultimate cost, in some extreme cases, can be fatal.

The impacts of abuse against women as disclosed to Women's Aid in 2016 included:

- Broken limbs, broken teeth, broken jaw, bruising to the face and body, head injuries and internal injuries due to rape and sexual assault.
- Being left with permanent scars and disfigurement.
- Being hospitalised, losing consciousness due to strangulation.
- Sexual health issues including lack of access to family planning, STIs or experiencing an unplanned pregnancy due to rape.
- Experiencing miscarriage as a result of assault.
- Loss of job, loss of home, experiencing hardship as a lone parent.
- Alcohol and substance misuse.
- Post-traumatic stress, anxiety, suicidal ideation and attempted suicide.
- Feeling exhausted, isolated, depressed. Having low self-esteem and self-doubt as a result of the abuse.

Women and children experiencing domestic violence **should never be portrayed as passive victims**. We continue to be inspired by the women who use our services. Women who are trying to live their lives, raise their children, study, work, and look after others, but who are doing so while suffering the most horrific abuse. Their **resilience and strength** in the face of such abuse should not be underestimated.

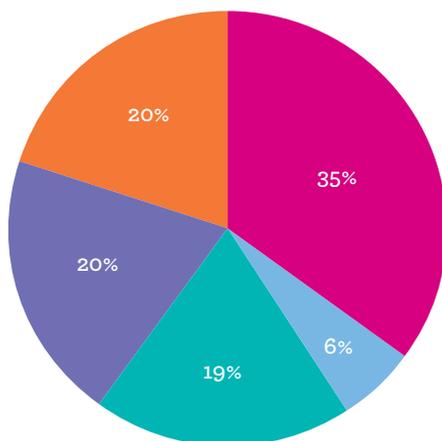
## THE ABUSER

The vast majority of perpetrators of domestic violence are men, who deliberately use abusive behaviour to control their partners or former partners. Abusive men come from all walks of life. Domestic violence is about power and control and it is deliberate, systematic and intentional behaviour. Abusers choose to abuse. There is no excuse and the victim is never to blame.

For the women who contacted us in 2016, **80% were being abused by a current or ex male intimate partner.**

54% of women who we supported in 2016 were being abused by a current boyfriend, partner or husband. However, **a quarter of women (26%) were being abused by an ex-boyfriend, partner or husband.**

**Chart 3: Relationship status of the abuser as disclosed by women in contacts with our Direct Services.**



(n=8,173)

● Husband	35%
● Ex-Husband	6%
● Partner	19%
● Ex-Partner	20%
● Other	20%

## RESPONDING TO WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES, MIGRANT AND TRAVELLER WOMEN

Domestic violence can affect any woman, at any age and from any background. **In 550 calls to the 24hr National Freephone Helpline women identified that they were Migrant women, Traveller women and/or women with disabilities.** The biggest group were migrant women at 90% followed by women with a disability (6%) and Traveller women (4%).

We continued our **National Freephone Helpline Telephone Interpretation Service** which allows us to support women in 170 languages. In 2016, **250 calls were facilitated in 27 languages.** Some of these calls were initiated by professionals (Gardaí, refuge staff, GPs) in their quest to support women presenting to them. **82% of callers** who used the Telephone Interpretation Service spoke a range of **EU languages** including Polish, Hungarian, Portuguese and Romanian. The non-EU languages included Arabic, Mandarin and Russian.

**28% of new women** we saw in 2016 in our One to One Support service **were Migrant women.** Just over half were from non-EU member states while 44% were from EU member states. **Additional barriers** faced by migrant women affected by domestic violence include:

- Language barrier;
- The impact of the lack of independent residency status;
- Ineligibility for social protection;
- Limited access to emergency accommodation.

Women may also face pressures and have a reduced number of options because of their cultural or religious backgrounds. For migrant women with particularly complicated cases, **Women's Aid works alongside migrant rights organisations** such as the Immigrant Council of Ireland and the Irish Refugee Council.

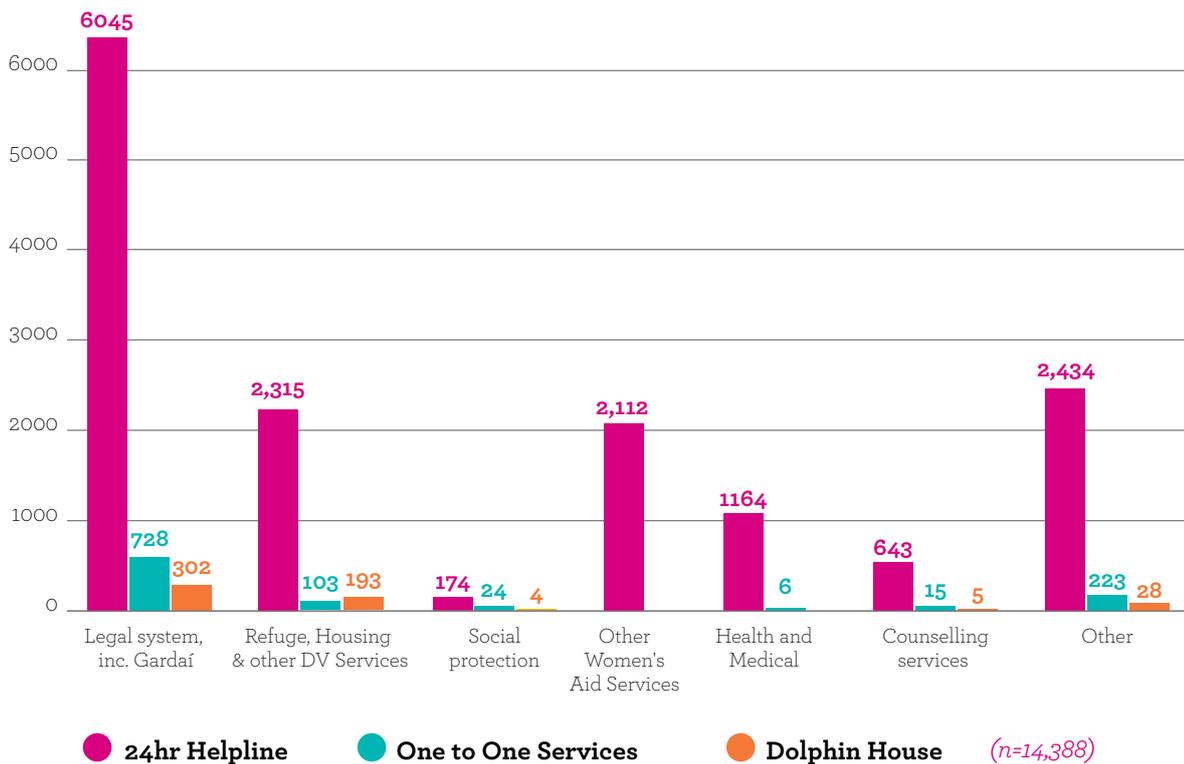


## SUPPORT OFFERED

In addition to being **listening** and **support** services, the Women’s Aid 24hr National Freephone Helpline, our One to One services and Dolphin House Support and Referral Service provide a valuable source of **information, onward referral and advocacy** for

women experiencing domestic violence. In 2016, there were **16,518** referrals, provision of information and/or advocacy made during 14,388 contacts with Women’s Aid. The areas covered are outlined in chart 4. We also support women by **safety planning** and **risk assessment** to support them in their efforts to keep themselves and children as safe as possible.

Chart 4: Information, Referrals and Advocacy during contacts with Direct Services.

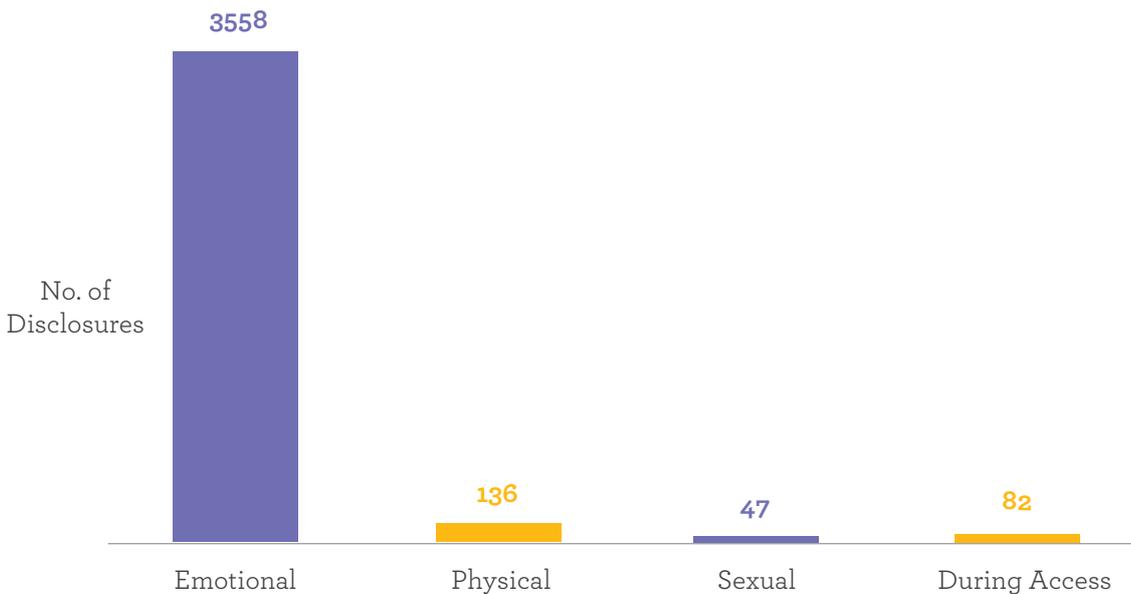


# Domestic Violence and Children



2016  
SPOTLIGHT

Chart 5: 3,823 disclosures of child abuse during contacts with Direct Services.



(n=14,388)

There were **3,823 disclosures of child abuse** in the context of domestic violence made to Women’s Aid in 2016<sup>4</sup>. This figure includes **3,558 disclosures of emotional abuse** and **183 disclosures of physical and sexual abuse against children**. It also includes **82 disclosures of where children were being abused during access visits**. In addition, we noted 18 disclosures of child abduction in the context of domestic violence. Domestic violence continues to be a very common context in which children experience abuse, **with the abuser of the mother being the abuser of the children**. It has also been found that the **more severe the domestic violence, the more severe the abuse of children**. Where you find domestic violence against women you will often find the perpetrator will deliberately target children as a way to hurt both them and their mother.

International best practice recognises that the **best form of child protection is to work with the non-abusive partner, usually the mother**. We work to support the mother in her ongoing efforts to protect and keep her children safe.

The abusive tactics used against children living with domestic violence in 2016 included:

- Children witnessing verbal, physical and sexual abuse against their mother.
- Children being slapped, punched, shouted at and called names.
- Children and their mothers being threatened with murder-suicide.
- Children being sexually abused.
- Children being emotionally manipulated and used against their mother.
- Children being told lies about their mother by the abuser.

Women’s Aid also noted the number of women with children using our **One to One Support Service** in 2016. The majority of women had children, with **at least 564 children living in homes where domestic violence is a feature**.

<sup>4</sup> Women’s Aid works in line with *Children First (2011)* which callsers and clients are made aware of when confidentiality or limits of confidentiality are being discussed. The Women’s Aid Confidentiality Policy is available online at [www.womensaid.ie/download/pdf/womens\\_aid\\_confidentiality\\_policy.pdf](http://www.womensaid.ie/download/pdf/womens_aid_confidentiality_policy.pdf).

## ABUSE OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN DURING ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

Many of the women we support are concerned that access arrangements ordered by the court are placing their children at further risk of abuse. When women leave abusive relationships they face negotiating the legal system for custody, access and maintenance. Where there is a history of domestic violence, this process leaves women vulnerable to further abuse, particularly during unsupervised access visits.

In 2016, we heard **411 disclosures from mothers that their ex partners were using access visits to abuse them** often in front or in ear shot of the children.. It was disclosed **82 times that children were being directly physically, emotionally and/or sexually abused while on access visits with their fathers.**

This abuse against women and children during access included:

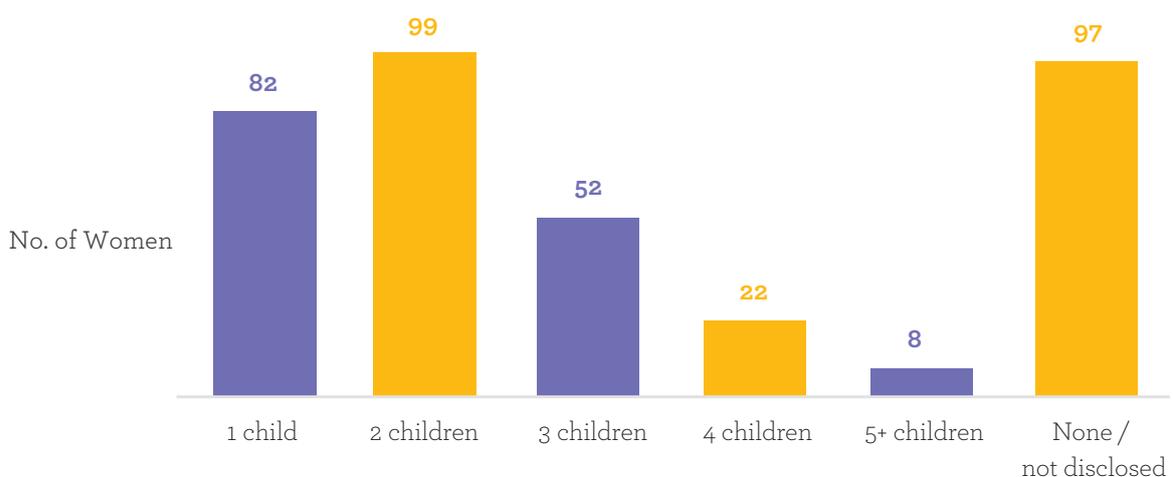
- Children being forced to go on access visits despite being afraid of their father.
- Women being verbally attacked and threatened while handing over the children for access.

- Women being threatened that they will never see the children again.
- Access commitments not being met by the abuser including not showing up for visits, not collecting the children on time and not returning children to their mother when agreed.
- Children being slapped and punched during access.
- Children being sexually abused by their fathers during access visits.

Where there has been abuse of children and where there continues to be a threat of harm to children, it is distressing for women to facilitate unsupervised access visits.

Where a woman we support has no concerns about the safety of her children, she will do her utmost to facilitate time with their father. The majority of women tell us that they want to find a way to support an ongoing relationship between their children and their fathers.

Chart 6: Number of women using our One to One Service for the first time in 2016 who had children.



(n=360)

## IMPROVING PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Women's Aid supports women every day in their efforts to keep themselves and their children safe. Through this experience, we recommend that:

1. The Court should consider the safety and well-being of any children of the relationship when granting a Barring Order and take interim measures, as necessary, for their protection.
2. Experts should be made available to the Court to assess the risk the perpetrator poses to children and the impact on them of direct and/indirect abuse.
3. Funding is made available for Child Contact Centres to facilitate safe, supervised access visits between children and perpetrators of domestic violence.
4. Funding is made available for all staff in agencies that assist women experiencing domestic violence to be trained to understand the impact of abuse on women and children and the risk of abuse continuing or escalating post-separation, such as the Women's Aid 'Best Practice in Woman and Child Protection in the Context of Domestic Violence' two day training.



## WORKING FOR JUSTICE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN 2016

### Training for professionals responding to domestic violence

We provided a **national programme of specialised training and support** to a variety of participants and organisations from the community, voluntary and statutory sectors.

The funding we receive under the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO), administered by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, is essential in order to allow us to continue to provide essential training to service providers who work with disadvantaged target groups, in particular.

Demand for training on responding to domestic violence remained high in 2016 and **we delivered training to over 671 staff** from organisations in Dublin, Kilkenny, Kerry, Tipperary, Waterford, Westmeath and Wexford.

These groups included participants from addiction and homeless services, Public Health nursing, social work, domestic violence services, the Courts Service, the Legal Aid Board, An Garda Síochána, Citizens Information Services, family support services and youth services.

We also delivered Helpline Volunteer Training to two new groups of volunteers and they have now become part of the Helpline team of volunteers.

### Raising awareness and providing hope

In 2016, Women's Aid continued to **lead the way in raising awareness and providing public information on domestic violence** to women experiencing abuse and wider society. Our annual public awareness campaigns and communications activity are an important way to highlight the prevalence, nature and impact of domestic and dating abuse in Ireland. We also engage with the media to promote our 24hr National Freephone Helpline and other support services.

Highlights in 2016 included:

- Women's Aid generated **260+ pieces of media coverage on domestic violence** in 2016 ranging from local radio interviews, online news stories, opinion pieces in national print media and interviews with TV news and national radio.
- In February 2016, Women's Aid ran our annual **2in2u campaign** on dating abuse.
- In September we officially **launched our 24hr National Freephone Helpline** with the help of Minister Katherine Zappone, T.D.
- In October, **Women's Aid partnered with Facebook** to launch a guide for women on Staying Safe on Facebook.
- On UN Day Opposing Violence against Women (25th November), we published our **Femicide Watch 1996-2016**. The Behind Closed Doors report outlined the details of the the killing of 209 women and 16 children in Ireland over 20 years and the links between Femicide and domestic violence.

### Providing a lifeline, online – [www.WomensAid.ie](http://www.WomensAid.ie)

There were **136,845 visits to the Women's Aid website** in 2016. With a monthly average of 11,403 visits, we know that the website provides vital information to women experiencing domestic violence as well as to the general public. 80% of visits were new. Our **stand alone** website on dating abuse, [www.2in2u.ie](http://www.2in2u.ie), received **9,594 visits**.



Margaret Martin, Director of Women's Aid, and Minister of State Regina Doherty, T.D., at the launch of the Women's Aid Femicide Watch 1996-2016 viewing the 'Behind Closed Doors' exhibition remembering all 209 women and 16 children who died violently since our records began. (Pic: Sharppix).

### Working for justice & encouraging positive Government action

Women's Aid works with government to provide solution based recommendations on improving legal responses and protection for women experiencing domestic violence. In addition, Women's Aid is represented on a number of national and local fora. In 2016, this work included:

- Our **#DomesticViolenceMatters** General Election campaign outlined what we wanted the next government to do to make sure everyone experiencing domestic violence gets the support they need. These actions were in line with the Istanbul Convention and the EU Victims' Directive. We encouraged local organisations and the public to raise issues with election candidates.
- **Submissions** to the New National Women's Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2020; to ComReg on Provision of Payphones and to the Public Consultation on Commissioning Human, Social and Community Services.
- Women's Aid also **met with Ministers, special advisors, officials and elected members of the Oireachtas** to discuss a range of issues including: our 2015 Impact Report; the Harmful Communications Recommendations by the Law Reform Commission; funding challenges and legislative changes needed to increase safety for those experiencing domestic violence; child custody and access in the context of domestic violence and conditions in the Family Law Court in Dolphin House.
- Continued **representation and membership** role at: the Monitoring Committee of the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence; the Irish Observatory on Violence against Women; Safe Ireland; National Women's Council of Ireland; Southside Addressing Violence Effectively (SAVE); Legal Aid Board External Consultative Panel; Family Law Court Users Panel; Garda National Crime Victims Forum (GNCVF); Women against Violence Europe (WAVE) and the Turn Off the Red Light Campaign.



## ABOUT US

Women's Aid is the leading national organisation that has been working in Ireland to stop domestic violence against women and children since 1974.

We work to **make women and children safe** from domestic violence by **offering support** to women & their families and friends, **providing hope** to those affected by abuse and **working for justice and social change**.

### Our Direct Services:

- **24hr National Freephone Helpline**  
1800 341 900 including:
  - a **text service for deaf and hard of hearing women** on 087 9597980 (8am to 8pm, 7 days)
  - **interpretation service** offering support in over **170 languages** (8am to 8pm, 7 days) via the main Helpline number.
- **One to One Service** including safety planning, information, advocacy & referral.
- **Court Accompaniment Service** for women
- **Dolphin House Support and Referral Service**<sup>5</sup>
  - Drop in Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 1.30pm, 4th Floor.

*All services are free, confidential and non-judgemental.*

### We also work for Justice and Social Change by:

- Raising awareness including public information campaigns and communications.
- Working for positive government action and working together for justice.
- Providing specialised training.

See [www.WomensAid.ie](http://www.WomensAid.ie) for more details.

Our **2016 Financial Statements** will be available on our website in June 2017.

### Thank you

Women's Aid would like to thank all of our volunteers, supporters, funders, corporate partners and donors who make our work possible. A special thanks to our Charity Shop staff and volunteers in Dundrum and Terenure in Dublin. They raise much needed funds to keep our services operating. We are also grateful for the support and strong working relationships with other domestic violence services and refuges around Ireland and other networks acting to bring about real change and protection for women affected by domestic violence.

***"I still think of that day – the day I called Women's Aid – as the day my life changed forever."***

# Support our Work

Visit [www.womensaid.ie/donate](http://www.womensaid.ie/donate) to make an immediate and secure donation.

Text the word **ACTION** to **50300** to donate €4 to Women's Aid.

100% of your donation goes to Women's Aid across most network operators. Some operators apply VAT which means that a minimum of €3.25 will go to Women's Aid. Service Provider: LIKECHARITY. Helpline: 0766805278.

## WOMEN'S AID

5 Wilton Place, Dublin 2, Ireland.

Tel: 01-6788858

Email: [info@womensaid.ie](mailto:info@womensaid.ie)

[www.womensaid.ie](http://www.womensaid.ie)

**National Freephone Helpline 1800 341 900**

Registered charity number 6491



## WOMEN'S AID

Listening. Believing. Supporting.