Women’s Aid
National Freephone Helpline & Support Services

Annual Statistics 2010

1800 341 900
FRONT COVER: Women’s Aid Public Action outside Dáil Éireann to launch their 16 Days of Action against Violence Against Women 2010. (Picture by Paul Sharp/Sharppix)
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Our deepest hope is that this report will increase understanding and improve the safety and wellbeing of women and children affected by domestic violence.

Part of the work of Women's Aid is to highlight the reality of domestic violence without breaking the confidence of the women we work with. This is a task we take very seriously and the qualitative information included in this report highlights only where we have seen a common pattern of abuse. While every woman's story is unique, there are many disturbing tactics that are common to abusive partners including physical assaults, verbal abuse and death threats.

Women in an abusive relationship often don't know where to turn. Frightened, confused and isolated, it’s hard for them to see a way out. The confidential and anonymous nature of the Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline and our direct Support Services provides an important, safe and non-judgmental space for women to take that first step and to begin to talk about their experiences. Our highly trained and dedicated volunteers and staff are ready to respond the minute the phone rings. Many initial calls to our Helpline are silent. Women have told us that they had often been too afraid and ashamed to speak to anyone, even friends or family. For many of our callers, our Helpline is where they begin to make sense of what is happening to them. Countless more women have benefited from our awareness campaigns, training initiatives, advocacy work and extensive print and online resources. Women can avail of our services for as long as they need to.

It Can Happen to Any Woman

The sad reality is that domestic violence can happen to anyone: your sister, your mother, your friends, your colleagues, or yourself. It is far from uncommon. We know that one in five Irish women who have ever been in a relationship experience physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in Ireland. In 2010, we responded to over 10,000 calls on our Helpline. We heard from thousands of women living with abuse and fear. Fear of being choked or strangled, fear of the next beating or cutting remark that is designed to erode their confidence and put them down. Women being gagged to silence their screams. Women whose abusive partners repeatedly threaten to kill them, their children and themselves. Jeering the women and telling them not to bother telling anyone - that no one will believe them. All too often, these women feel completely isolated and alone, unaware that there is help available. We know that about one third of women never tell anyone about the abuse they suffer. Instead, these women try to survive and protect themselves and their children on their own.

Leaving a relationship does not always end abuse. Almost a fifth of women continued to be abused, stalked and harassed by former partners. These women disclosed how they are bombarded with texts and calls often telling them, in explicit detail, how they will be attacked or even killed. Some women disclosed that their current or ex-boyfriends were stalking them on social networking sites.

But there is help available. Over the past 35 years, countless women have gone on to lead safe and fulfilling lives with the help and support of Women's Aid.

Younger Women and Dating Abuse

Last year we highlighted how disclosures to our Helpline revealed a growing trend that various forms of technology were being used by abusive partners to monitor and control women, particularly younger women. This trend has continued with women disclosing similar abuse such as their mobile phone calls and texts being monitored and social media and technology being used to stalk and control them. There is a common misconception that violence and abuse only occurs in older and more established relationships, where women are married or living with, and/or have children with their abusive partner. Our experience and national and international research shows that young women are also at risk from violence and abuse from their boyfriends. Age is no protection. Time and again we hear how young women in dating relationships are affected by violence and abuse. We also hear from older women living with domestic violence that the signs that her partner was possessive and controlling were there from the start. But to her and those around her, it appeared like he was just so into her.

The statistics are startling. In a national survey on domestic violence, almost 60% of those who had experienced severe abuse in intimate relationships, first experienced it when they were under the age of 25. More chilling data from resolved homicide cases shows that of the 39 women aged between 18 and 25 years who were killed since 1996, 53% were murdered by a boyfriend or former boyfriend.

This growing trend prompted us to develop the Women’s Aid 2in2u National Public Awareness Campaign, a groundbreaking campaign highlighting the issue of violence and abuse against young women in dating relationships. This campaign was made possible by funding through Cosc.

www.WomensAid.ie – Providing a Lifeline, Online

While technology can be used as a tool to control and abuse women, it can also serve as their lifeline. We were delighted to launch our new website in June 2010. This was made possible through our partnership with Avon and the Avon Speak Out against Domestic Violence programme. Our hope is that our website will strengthen our ability to be a lifeline,
online. We received a total of 48,000 visits to our website in 2010, and since it’s relaunch visitor numbers have increased by 52%. Our ability to connect using Facebook and Twitter is also growing and provides a wonderful opportunity to engage with new audiences and to promote our services and highlight our work online.

Some significant developments have been made possible with the support of the HSE Intercultural Strategy and part of our website is now available in seven languages. We are conscious of the additional barriers that migrant women face as a third of users of our Support Services are migrant women. We hope that this helps to make our services more accessible to women from migrant communities.

Gaps in Legal Protection from Domestic Violence: Women Outside the Law

Again in 2010, Women’s Aid continued to hear from women dismayed and frustrated at being ineligible for Domestic Violence Orders. During 2010, 13% of callers disclosed abuse by current non-married partners. Many of these women will find themselves unable to access Domestic Violence Orders, for example, if they never lived with their partner, even if they have a child in common. In addition, 10% of callers experienced abuse from a former non-married partner. Again, this is a group of women whose safety needs are not being met as they are often ineligible to apply for protection under the Domestic Violence Act 1996. We hear from young women who are being stalked and harassed by ex-boyfriends months after the relationship ends, and women who are being victimised every time they see the fathers of their children. We hear from women experiencing domestic violence, but who did not live with their partners for the requisite amount of time under current legislation. When women in these situations try to access the justice system to end the violence, they find that they fall outside the law. The right to legal protection from domestic violence needs to be available to all intimate partners regardless of marital status or whether or not they have ever lived with their partner. This is the position of the current UN Guidelines on Domestic Violence Legislation.

There appeared to be some progress on this issue initially through the Civil Partnership Bill 2009 and later through the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2010. Proposed amendments to the Domestic Violence Act 1996 included in these Bills would have gone somewhat towards an extension of eligibility for Domestic Violence Orders for categories of partners currently not covered. While Women’s Aid was encouraged by the then Minister for Justice, Dermot Ahern’s commitment to extend eligibility to unmarried couples with a child in common, some concerns remained, including that partners in dating relationships would have remained unprotected. In the end, however, the only change that actually took place before the election was the extension of eligibility to same sex civil partners, now treated as spouses.

We now have renewed hope with the Programme for Government which includes a commitment to ‘introduce consolidated and reformed domestic violence legislation to address all aspects of domestic violence, threatened violence and intimidation in a manner that provides protection to victims’.

Raising Awareness

During November, Women’s Aid joined groups around the world as part of the 16 Days of Action Opposing Violence against Women. Women’s Aid held a National Balloon Action Day on 25th November 2010 in solidarity with the one in five women affected by domestic violence. Thousands of balloons were released in solidarity by communities around the country and thousands more were released online via the Women’s Aid website feature.

The 16 Days campaign is an important way of raising awareness of the issue at a national and local level. By being active in our communities during the campaign through events, exhibitions, public actions and debates; and by engaging with the media and local elected representatives, we can all push for positive change to make women safer.

Women’s Aid plays a key role in supporting approximately 270 community groups and Family Resource Centres to take action during this time. Groups were provided with resources, encouraged to get informed; get active and get connected. A co-ordinated 16 Facts for the 16 Days e-mail campaign is well established and builds awareness with thousands of people. In 2010, Women’s Aid also hosted the largest ever display of the International 365 Violence against Women Poster Exhibition at the Light House Cinema in Dublin.

Thank You

Women’s Aid continued to work tirelessly in 2010 to make women and children safe from domestic violence. We are indebted to all our supporters, funders, and donors who make our work possible. It was a year that brought many challenges, particularly financial ones. The generosity we witnessed during this time of difficulty was deeply supportive and affirming. An example of this is the pro bono work of Emma Gottesman who has shared her analytical and statistical skills to improve our cover on the Helpline. We have begun to implement some changes based on her findings and look forward to improving our ability to respond to those women who desperately need our help.

I would like to pay a special tribute to the donors who support us, our volunteers, our talented staff and the Board for their commitment and hard work. They are the reason why Women’s Aid continues to be one of the leading national organisations working to end violence against women in Ireland.

Margaret Martin
Director
Work to Address Violence against Women

Women’s Aid has been working to address the issue of domestic violence in Ireland for more than 35 years. In this time, the organisation has built up a huge body of experience and expertise on the issue, enabling us to best support women and share this knowledge with other agencies responding to women experiencing domestic violence.

Direct Services to Women

Our direct services to women experiencing domestic violence underpin and inform all of our work towards ending Violence against Women.

The Women’s Aid National Freephone Helpline (1800 341 900) operates from 10am to 10pm, every day of the year (except Christmas day), and provides support and information to callers experiencing abuse from intimate partners.

The Helpline is staffed by professional and well trained staff and volunteers. The Helpline is staffed by women at all times.

Our Support Services Team provides more in-depth, one-to-one information and support, Monday to Friday, in six locations throughout Dublin: Ballymun; Cabra; Coolock; Dublin City Centre; Dun Laoghaire; and, Swords. Other meeting points for Support Meetings include hospitals, or other locations chosen by women for safety reasons. Referrals to our Support Services come via the National Freephone Helpline, as well as from a range of other services such as An Garda Síochána, GPs, social workers and hospital staff.

The Support Services Team also offer a Court Accompaniment Service, which provides advocacy and support specific to the particular needs of women seeking legal redress regarding violence by a current, or former, husband or partner.

All of the services outlined above operate from and are underpinned by the following principles:

• Complete confidentiality.¹

• Maximising women’s safety at all times.

• Understanding the trauma of violence and supporting women’s increasing autonomy, while recognising the woman as expert in her own situation.

• Being informed and knowledgeable about the rights, entitlements and options for women and ensuring referral is appropriate and responsible.

• Advocating for women’s rights.

• Addressing additional barriers and discriminations that women experience.

• Being committed to ensuring justice for the victim and accountability and sanctions against violent men.

• Recognising that the best form of child protection in domestic violence situations is woman protection.

• Supporting women to move from crisis to safety and independence.

• Ongoing commitment to action for political and institutional change.

• Encompassing key feminist principles within the philosophy and ethos of the organisation.

In 2010, Women’s Aid also:

• Provided specialised training to assist a wide range of agencies and professionals in providing appropriate services to women experiencing domestic violence, including: accident and emergency staff; maternity staff; social workers; mental health workers; family support workers; community care workers; and, Women’s Aid National Freephone Helpline volunteer support workers.

• Continued its role as a Specialist Support Agency on Violence against Women, working with Family Resource Centres, and Community Development Projects within the Local and Community Development Programme nationwide and providing training, support and information resources to approximately 270 community groups as they develop their local responses to address Violence against Women.

• Trained 200 students at the Garda Training College.

• Worked in conjunction with three Dublin refuges through the Women’s Aid Arts Programme to provide creative self-development for women and children in refuges. Due to limited resources, this work was phased out in the summer of 2010 and the refuges were provided with information to continue the work independently.

• Was represented at policy level at both national and local levels including the National Steering Committee (NSC) on Violence against Women; the Legal Issues and the Public Awareness Sub-committees of the NSC; the Irish Observatory on Violence against Women; the Women’s Human Rights Alliance; the Legal Aid Board External Consultative Panel; and, the Courts Service Users Panel.

• Worked to raise awareness of the complexity and devastating consequences of domestic violence through a variety of means from media activity, provision of information, collation of statistics, and campaigns such as the 16 Days of Action Opposing Violence against Women.

• Continued to conduct research in the area of domestic violence and seek to influence legislative change to improve state responses to women experiencing domestic violence.

¹ Women’s Aid has a policy in line with the Children First Guidelines which callers and clients are made aware of if disclosing child abuse.
Introduction

These statistics relate to the period: January 1st 2010 to December 31st 2010. They are presented in two parts: Part 1 relates to contact to the Women’s Aid National Freephone Helpline and Part 2 relates to Women’s Aid Support Services.

Note on Data collected

The information collected relates to details and facts disclosed by women in the process of their contact with the Women’s Aid National Freephone Helpline and Support Services. As the primary aim of these services is to provide support and information to women, Women’s Aid does not seek to 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 abuse being experienced and the barriers and obstacles to seeking help.

2010 in Brief

10,055 Helpline calls answered
13,575 Disclosures of abuse to the National Freephone Helpline
1,150 Telephone support and advocacy calls by the Support Services Team
815 Disclosures of abuse to one-to-one Support Services
430 One-to-one support visits
164 Court accompaniments
The Women’s Aid National Freephone Helpline is free to all callers within the Republic of Ireland. The National Freephone Helpline is open every day of the year (except Christmas day) from 10am to 10pm. The Helpline provides vital support and information to individual callers and serves as an access point to other Women’s Aid Services, in addition to support services and refuges nationwide.

The following statistics have been collected by volunteers and staff of the Helpline. They have been recorded and collated to give a broad overview of contact with this service.

In 2010, the Women’s Aid National Freephone Helpline responded to 10,055 calls during which 13,575 disclosures of domestic violence were made.

1.1 Calls Received

Chart 1 indicates the types of calls received by Women’s Aid National Freephone Helpline. **68% of calls were support calls** from women experiencing physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse primarily at the hands of an intimate male partner. Women who ring our Helpline often simply want to talk about their relationship. It may be something that happened recently that hurt or confused them or it may be something that has emerged over time. Because domestic violence is not a once off event, but rather a pattern which often escalates over time, it can be difficult to see. By having a safe, non-judgemental space to talk about it, women can begin to explore concerns and fears they have been carrying around for a while, but have been unable to voice. This figure includes a small number of support calls where women were seeking support or information on issues either indirectly related or unrelated to domestic abuse. These calls include support and information on family planning, bereavement, parenting alone and legal information on topics such as criminal law.

**Indirect support and administration calls** refers to the many calls that the Helpline receives from voluntary and statutory bodies looking for information or support on issues arising in their work in relation to domestic abuse. The individuals using our service include members of An Garda Síochána, social workers, local support services, GPs and hospital staff. We also receive calls from women experiencing domestic violence who need the contact numbers for local domestic violence support services and refuges.

**Hang-up calls** happen where the caller puts the phone down immediately after it is answered by a support worker. Many women disclose that they have hung up a number of times before beginning to speak about what they are experiencing. For many women, the first call is often hugely significant, as speaking to our workers may be the first time that a woman has ever disclosed her abusive situation to another person. It can be a daunting prospect and it can frequently take a number of attempts to begin this process.
1.2 Disclosures of Abuse
Chart 2 details the disclosures of abuse made by callers to the Helpline. Many callers disclose that they have experienced multiple forms of abuse at the hands of their abuser. For this reason, the actual number of disclosures surpasses the number of support calls.

There were 13,575 disclosures of emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse made to the Helpline in 2010. Where there is physical abuse, there is always emotional abuse. Emotional abuse often involves threats of physical or sexual abuse. Emotional abuse is a highly effective means of establishing a power imbalance within a relationship. It is often unseen or intangible to those outside the relationship. It is more difficult to get legal protection where such abuse occurs in the absence of physical abuse and yet emotional abuse can have devastating consequences for women. Indeed, many women report that it is this abuse that they feel is the most damaging to their self esteem and sense of self and, in many cases, their mental health.

Where there is a dynamic of control and abuse in an intimate relationship, the likelihood of sexual coercion and abuse is high. Therefore, while direct disclosures of sexual abuse are noted as being 588 in 2010, the reality is that a far larger number of women will probably experience sexual abuse in an abusive relationship. It is harder for women who are being abused by their partner to negotiate a free and equal sexual relationship with that partner. The sexual abuse figure includes 213 incidents of rape.

Financial abuse is a form of domestic violence in which the abuser uses money as a means of controlling his partner. It is a tactic that abusers use to gain power and dominance over their partners and is designed to isolate a woman into a state of complete financial dependence. By controlling the woman’s access to financial resources, the abuser ensures that she will be forced to choose between staying in an abusive relationship and facing extreme poverty. Like other forms of domestic violence, financial abuse occurs within all ages, ethnicities, educational and socio-economic backgrounds. Many callers to the Helpline in 2010 disclosed that they are trapped in abusive relationships and are more vulnerable to abuse due to the recession. Women reported they were experiencing domestic violence before the recession, but that the economic downturn was leading to more frequent abuse and more severe abuse. In addition, women disclosed that abusive men were using the recession to excuse their behaviour.

Lack of income is a common reason women cite for staying in an abusive relationship. Without money, options dwindle: no place to go, no means to get there and no way to provide for basic needs. However, even when women leave a relationship, the abuser can continue financial control and abuse.

This form of abuse is one that is often overlooked when people consider the more severe aspects of domestic violence - yet it is one of the most effective tactics used by an abuser to both control and undermine the well being of the woman they are hurting.

All tactics of abuse used by perpetrators are deliberate, controlling and unrelenting. The repetitive nature of the abuse has the effect of wearing a woman down gradually; making her doubt herself; isolating her from support systems such as friends and family; and, making her feel worthless and degraded. A large number of the abusive tactics disclosed by women are extremely threatening and, in some cases, leave women completely controlled and in fear of their lives. Even where no physical abuse has actually been perpetrated, the threat of such violence has an equally devastating impact.
1.3 Tactics of Abuse

Tactics of abuse disclosed by callers during the course of 2010 include:

**Emotional Abuse**
- Women being stalked and constantly monitored both while in the relationship and after they leave; women being harassed continuously by phone, text messages, and through social networks; women's access to internet either curtailed or monitored.
- Women not allowed to use their mobile phone or car; important documents such as passport of women and children being hidden or withheld.
- Women being blamed by the abuser for the abuse.
- Women threatened with weapons, threats by the abuser to kill the woman, the children or other family members; women threatened that their children will be abducted and taken overseas.
- Women never being left on their own; women not allowed to go anywhere without their husband/partner.
- Women controlled in what they do, who they see, how they look.
- Women's and children's pets being intentionally harmed in front of them.

**Physical Abuse**
- Women being beaten, slapped and kicked to the point of bleeding and injury.
- Women being gagged to stop screams during physical assaults.
- Women being choked, strangled and stabbed.
- Women being spat on, having their hair pulled and scalded.
- Women being slammed against the wall.
- Women being thrown out of the house or locked in for long periods.
- Pregnant women being beaten to the point of miscarriage.

**Sexual Abuse**
- Women being raped, often repeatedly, by partners and ex-partners.
- Women being raped in front of the children.
- Women being beaten and raped while pregnant or soon after delivery or miscarriage.
- Women being coerced into sex.
- Women being coerced into prostitution.

**Financial Abuse**
- Women's belongings being sold without their consent.
- Women not being given money to buy essentials for themselves and the children, including food and medication.
- Women forced to pay abusers’ debt.
- Abuser forcing women to put her benefits in his name and not giving her any money.
- Abuser not contributing anything to household expense, when they can afford to do so.
- Women forced to give all their wages to partners.
- Abuser withholding maintenance and lying about their income to the Courts.
- Women having to account for every cent they spend.
- Abuser jeopardising women's employment.
1.4 Impacts of Abuse

The impacts reported by women experiencing such abuse are understandably significant, long-term and wide ranging. The impacts of abuse as disclosed to the Helpline in 2010 include:

- Women feeling scared and unsafe; women feeling isolated and alone.
- Women feeling stressed, stress-related illnesses and women experiencing panic attacks and depression; women self harming and feeling suicidal.
- Women experiencing psychiatric illnesses and developing substance or alcohol addiction to cope with the abuse.
- Women feeling worn down physically and emotionally.
- Women losing jobs and financial independence.
- Unplanned pregnancy.
- Women suffering a miscarriage as a result of the abuse.
- Physical injuries including broken bones and bruises; hospitalisation due to the extent of physical injury.
- Women and children living in poverty.

1.5 'Relationship with Abuser

Chart 3 shows the relationship between the caller and their abuser. 74% of abusers in 2010 were male intimates. The male intimate category includes current or former husbands and partners and can be broken down as follows:

- **Husband:** 44%
- **Ex-husband:** 7%
- **Partner:** 13%
- **Ex-partner:** 10%

57% of abuse disclosed to Women’s Aid was perpetrated by a current husband or partner with marriage remaining the most common context for abuse. Abuse by current non-married partners was disclosed by 13% of callers. Abuse by a former partner or husband is also very common and was disclosed by 17% of callers.

Types of abuse disclosed after a relationship has ended include:

- Continued physical and sexual assaults.
- Threats of and actual physical assault of women’s new partners.
- Women being stalked, including being followed, harassed by phone calls, text messages or social networks and being harassed at work.
- Women being shouted at and followed in the street.
- Women being publicly humiliated.
- Damage to women’s new homes and property.

The high levels of abuse which women experience post-separation illustrates the continued risk which perpetrators can pose - even where women have definitively left the relationship. 10% of callers (437 women) experienced abuse from a former partner to whom they were not married. This group is especially vulnerable as many are not eligible to apply for protection under the Domestic Violence Act, 1996, and thus have less recourse to immediate protection than married women who leave an abusive partner.

Over a quarter of callers disclosed abuse from a non-intimate family member or other person.
1.6 Abuse of Children

In 2010, there were 1,658 specific incidents of child abuse disclosed by callers to the Helpline. These are incidents where the perpetrator was directly abusing the children of the relationship, as well as the mother. Chart 4 illustrates that emotional abuse is the most common form of abuse perpetrated against children by domestic violence perpetrators, which reflects the experience of women. While abuse of children is a huge issue in itself, in domestic violence situations, actual or threatened abuse of children is often used as a controlling mechanism over women.

The kinds of abusive tactics used directly against children living in domestic violence situations disclosed to the National Freephone Helpline in 2010 include:

- Abuser smacking and hitting children including with household items.
- Abuser physically and sexually abusing children.
- Children being manipulated against the woman; abusers saying lies about the mother to children, making children side with the abuser.
- Abusers constantly shouting in children's faces.

In addition to the 1,658 specific incidents of child abuse reported in 2010, in another 2,946 calls it was directly disclosed that children were living in situations where their mother was experiencing domestic violence. In the majority of these incidents, it is likely that children will have witnessed or heard the abuse of their mother. Witnessing domestic violence is identified as a form of emotional abuse of children.2

1.6i Abuse During Access Arrangements

5% of callers disclosed that access visits were being used by abusive ex-partners to abuse the children of the relationship. The issue of custody and access in the context of domestic violence remains extremely problematic for women trying to manage their own, and their children’s safety, following the end of an abusive relationship. The ways perpetrators are reportedly using access visits and arrangements to continue abusing women and children is a cause for great concern. In 198 calls, mothers disclosed that they had been directly abused during access arrangements.

The following types of abuse were disclosed as occurring during access visits:

- Abusers threatening to or actually abducting children – within and outside Ireland.
- Women being abused (physically, emotionally and sexually) during contact for access visits.
- Children being neglected/not fed during access.

As the Women’s Aid National Freephone Helpline does not solicit information from callers and only records what is disclosed in the natural course of calls, it is likely that the above figures represent the tip of the iceberg in relation to children’s experience of abuse in the home, where their mother is also suffering.

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2 Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People.
1.7 Gender of Callers

Women made up the vast majority of callers to the Helpline in 2010 accounting for 97% of calls, while 3% of callers were male.

1.8 Repeat and First Time Contacts with the Helpline

In 2010, 43% of callers disclosed that they were in repeat contact with the service. In some cases, women will use the service for years to access non-directive support while coping with or overcoming their experiences of abuse. From the percentage of repeat callers, we can surmise that up to 57% of callers (3,655 support calls) accessed support for the first time from Women’s Aid in 2010.

1.9 Location of Callers

Almost one third of callers to the Women’s Aid National Freephone Helpline (28%) called from locations outside Dublin, demonstrating the national impact of the Helpline. 39% of callers who contacted us were residing in the Greater Dublin Area, while 33% of callers did not disclose a location.

In addition to these figures, there were 34 calls from outside the Republic of Ireland.
1.10 Services Provided to Callers

As well as support, the Women’s Aid National Freephone Helpline provides information on and referrals to a range of other services, as illustrated in Chart 8. The largest categories can broadly be divided between protection (information on legal options) and practical survival (housing and social welfare).

1.11 Minority Callers

297 callers to the National Freephone Helpline were noted as minority callers. Of that total figure, 81% of calls were from migrant women.
Part 2 – Women’s Aid Support Services

The statistics in this section relate to the Women’s Aid Support Services, which provide one-to-one Support Meetings with women, a Court Accompaniment Service, and telephone support to women experiencing domestic violence. Our Support Services Team provides in-depth, one-to-one information and support, Monday to Friday, in six locations throughout Dublin. These locations are:

- Ballymun
- Cabra
- Coolock
- Dublin City Centre
- Dun Laoghaire
- Swords

Other meeting points for Support Meetings include hospitals, prisons, and locations chosen by the woman for safety reasons. Referrals to our Support Services Team come via the National Freephone Helpline, as well as from a range of other services such as GPs, social workers and hospitals.

The Support Services Team also offers a Court Accompaniment Service to women. This service provides advocacy and support specific to the particular needs of women seeking legal redress regarding violence by a current or former husband or partner, or those who have Family Law proceedings such as separation, custody and access in a context of domestic violence.
2.1 Support Provided by Women’s Aid Support Services

Chart 10 shows a breakdown of the Support Services provided to women in 2010. There were 430 support visits with 323 women. Support workers provided court accompaniment to women on 164 occasions. Further telephone support and advocacy was provided on 1,150 occasions to women already availing of the service.

79% of support visits were with women using the service for the first time, while 21% were with and on behalf of women who had previously used the service. This figure reflects the commitment of Women’s Aid to see as many women as possible each year, to constantly promote the services that we offer and to make information easily available to make women aware of these services.

Because of the ongoing and complex nature of domestic violence, women may need to avail of the service repeatedly for as long as they require support. Almost a third (29%)* of women using the service are migrant women who face additional barriers when affected by domestic violence.

2.2 Disclosures of Abuse

There were 815 disclosures of domestic violence to support workers during one-to-one support visits in 2010. Women experiencing domestic violence often endure multiple forms of abuse. Physical and sexual abuse never exists without emotional abuse being present. Chart 11 highlights the abuse disclosed to support workers during the course of support visits.

For this reason, the actual number of disclosures surpasses the number of support visits.

There were 222 disclosures of physical abuse recorded in 2010. Weapons were used in 20 cases. 16 of these cases occurred during pregnancy.

A further 422 disclosures of emotional abuse were reported. However, some women may not identify themselves as experiencing emotional abuse, focusing rather on the other forms of abuse.

Emotional abuse often involves threats of other forms of abuse, including death threats. In 2010, there were 40 death threats reported to the service. These threats are particularly chilling and include:

- Physical assault including choking and smothering accompanied by threats to kill.
- Acting out or describing in detail how the abuser is going to kill the woman.
- Threatening to kill the woman, her children and other members of her family, as well as himself. These threats are often made during physical assaults which put women in fear for their lives.

Emotional abuse also includes threats to the woman’s family, the man threatening self harm and stalking.

There were 76 disclosures of financial abuse and 51 disclosures of cases where the woman was abused during access arrangements, including 9 in which child were abducted or threatened with abduction.

The 44 disclosures of sexual abuse includes 11 disclosures of rape, and 12 of use of pornography to abuse the woman.

* Due to change in the Women’s Aid Support Services database this year, the information used in this section on migrant women is based only on women seen for the first time in 2010.
2.3 Relationship with Abuser

Chart 12 shows the women’s relationship with their abuser as disclosed to the Women’s Aid Support Services. Most clients disclose the identity of their abuser, with the overwhelming majority of this number (95%) being abused by a current or former male intimate. 71% of those were abused by a current male intimate. Of this number, 61% were being abused by a husband. 24% of women disclosed being abused by an ex-male intimate.

While a current intimate relationship is the most common context in which domestic violence occurs, women are also at risk even when they have definitively left an abusive relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current male intimate</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-male intimate</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 12 – Relationship with Abuser

2.4 Women’s Aid Court Accompaniment Service

There were a total of 164 court accompaniments in 2010. 62% of women had availed of the service previously, and 31% were first time users of the service.

Court accompaniment takes place at the request of a woman. Women’s Aid support workers will accompany women to court to provide support on the day, as well as in advance and after the court hearing. Our expert knowledge and understanding of the family law system and legal options supports women as they go through the legal process.

Women making applications for orders under the domestic violence legislation experience great stress. The violence being inflicted can be demoralising and humiliating. Confronting a technical legal court system, which has a language and procedure that women may be unfamiliar with, is intimidating. This can often be compounded by many factors, namely the fear of facing the abuser in a court of law and the very real threat/fear of retaliation by him. Many women find it difficult to seek the support of family and friends to aid them through the court process, as very often they will not have disclosed the abuse to those close to them.

A support visit always takes place in advance of court accompaniment. This allows the woman to fully explore her eligibility for the order she is seeking, and the possible consequences of any action, and allows her to plan for her safety. Women’s Aid support workers also explain court procedures and assist the woman to ensure all relevant documentation required on the day is prepared.

After the court hearing, support workers help women to come to terms with the decision of the court and identify safety measures for women and their children following the court hearing. We can also inform the woman of possible follow-up proceedings and options, if required.
2.5 Nature of Court Hearings

The vast majority of cases where Women’s Aid accompanied women to court either dealt with protection from abuse (civil orders under the Domestic Violence Act, 1996) or child related issues such as maintenance, access and custody.

This report refers to Domestic Violence Orders as the group of civil orders under the Domestic Violence Act, 1996, which provide legal protection from domestic violence. Domestic Violence Orders include the following:

- **Barring Order:** The abuser is barred from the family home and prohibited from using or threatening to use violence or abuse against the victim.

- **Safety Order:** Prohibits abuser from further violence or threats of violence, but there is no obligation on the abuser to leave the family home.

- **Protection Order:** Temporary order which operates as a Safety Order (see above) until the court hearing for either a Barring or Safety Order.

- **Interim Barring Order:** Temporary Barring Order granted where court deems Protection Order is not sufficient to protect the victim until the court hearing for either Barring or Safety Order.

More than a third (36%) of cases dealt with by the Women’s Aid Court Accompaniment Service related to Domestic Violence Orders. Over half of cases (51%) related to maintenance, guardianship and access to children. A further 3% related to breaches of Domestic Violence Orders and 9% to separation/divorce proceedings.
2.6 Outcomes of Court Accompaniment Visits

Domestic Violence Orders under the Domestic Violence Act 1996

Where the Women’s Aid Support Service accompanied a woman to court who was seeking a Domestic Violence Orders 55% of orders were granted; 20% adjourned or continued; and, 22% were not granted or struck out. The remainder (3%) were withdrawn or had another outcome.

Engagement with the legal system can place women at heightened risk. Orders such as Safety and Protection Orders, even where granted, may mean the woman continues to live with her abuser. Should her application for any order be unsuccessful, the woman may be placed at increased risk. Even where an order is granted, a woman’s safety can be further compromised as the abuser can be angered by what she has done, or the abuser may simply hold no regard for the law.

Support throughout this process is essential to ensure that women remain safe and proceed with their application, if appropriate. A key element of the Women’s Aid Court Accompaniment Service is examining the possible consequences of going to court and safety planning accordingly for before, during and after the court hearing.

After the court hearing, safety planning may include details of the nearest refuge or safe place the woman can go to, or explore how she’ll keep herself safe at home. Women’s Aid Support Workers frequently liaise with the Gardai and refuges in relation to safety planning post-court.
Working to End Violence Against Women