

**‘the personal & public cost of domestic violence’ Conference**

**21st November 2013, Maritime Hotel, Bantry**

**Questions to Speakers: First Morning Session, in response to Annie and Nata**

**Q. There was significant interest in the model referred to as MARAC by Annie and which was later also contained in Kylie’s presentation as an indication of progress in one of her studies. Annie was asked for more information on how MARAC operated, was it an effective method of protection for women & children and would Annie recommend it as something to be explored here.**

**A.** MARAC stands for Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference and it is aimed at adult high risk victims of domestic violence. It has been operating in N. Ireland since January 2010 and for longer in England & Wales. There is a gendered analysis of who the victims are and that is broken down into ethnicity, sexual orientation etc. and also the number of children in the household and that acts as a resource in terms of figures also. It is a fast track process to put a safety plan together with all the key agencies at the table. Since 2010, in N Ireland 3,263 have gone through the process. The police chair the MARAC with probation, local social services and housing authorities and the DV expertise is provided by NI Women’s Aid. In the UK there are independent DV advocates provided from local support services who are accredited by the Home Office. It cuts out all the various meetings with individual agencies and gets right down to what has to be done to protect the women. In N.I. the police have found it effective for them and Women’s Aid are supportive too. A woman can be referred to MARAC even if she doesn’t consent and although that can raise issues for DV organisations, the view from NI Women’s Aid was that on the whole it takes the issue of prosecuting perpetrators and providing safety out of the hands of the person who is most likely to be dealing with post-traumatic stress and makes it the job of society to protect her. Despite teething issues, it has been working well. Annie urged that the model be looked at as a direction to go in.

**Q. To Annie: Annie was asked about the need to handle carefully issues where women who are being abused have children and their fears of having children taken from them especially with the recent introduction of child protection legislation. Women in DV relationships often feel like bad mothers because they are victims of abuse:**

**A.** The words, handling it sensitively and wisely are what is most key here and certainly form part of our framework for these issues. In N.I. we have all been on a journey with regard to child protection and we would inform the relevant authorities as required. However, in best practice there is less of a knee jerk reaction and more thinking about what can really be done to protect the children and protect the parenting by the mother. Often we would have children referred to us by social services so that we can support the mother and

children and try to move them out of that zone and in that respect there isn't an immediate take the children away and remove them to some institution, thereby traumatising them, leave the mother devastated and grief-ridden. But that's in the best cases and that doesn't always happen. But the really live issue for us is where women have successfully separated from abusers and he is out of the home but then the war begins around contact and access. And I mean war and the women are often not supported in the way they need by professionals. These are live situations where children are being dragged off to see an abuser whom they do not want to see. It's a very difficult one and we are working to get men's voices on board to support us, men who understand gender, power and control, insightful men's groups who care about all of the victims and the children. It's not done and dusted by any means...

**Q. Annie was asked about how best to support a woman with mental health issues who is either still living in a domestic violence situation or has managed to get out of it?**

A. It is a completely normal reaction to living with terror to have some sort of mental health issue. We would have the fundamental view that DV is the cause of the issue. It's that old saying; "you don't adjust your mind, the fault lies in reality" and the reality is the abuse. In the North there is a dearth of the kind of mental health care that understands the difficulties that domestic abuse cause. But perhaps the most important thing is to believe the woman and that can be the start of a healing journey. Unfortunately, there is a model used known as the 'Toxic Trio' – mental health issues, alcoholism and domestic violence, which treats all 3 as if they were equal. But this denies the gendered power and control and is blind to the underlying issue of coercive control. I think that ultimately, believing victims is a form of empowerment.

**Q. To Nata: You refer to the lack of stats in Ireland re: economic cost of DV, what can we actually do about that? Are there any forums or research ongoing at the moment in N. Ireland and what should we be doing locally, regionally, nationally?**

A. We have a small group in NUI Galway looking at this and have been in conversation with Safe Ireland to try and think about how we might do a study. An opportunity has arisen because the European Fundamental Rights Agency is conducting a survey across 27 countries including Ireland on the prevalence of DV and prevalence data in Ireland is outdated. I think that if a group of women's organisations could come together and say look at their case files to see what kind of costs are incurred we could perhaps develop a basic average cost per incident and that could be used to develop some macro estimates.

**Q. To Nata: Given that you have costed the impact of DV in developing countries, have you devised a template to help you do that? And could that template be used to look at DV costs in Ireland. Is it possible to look at a region within Ireland as a means of starting that process?**

Studies on the cost of violence have been done since the 1980s in several industrialised countries; Finland, Norway, Canada, Australia, US etc. My work takes from the industrialised countries experiences and is adapted to the developing countries. There is a template and there methodologies. It depends upon the level of complexity you want in your cost calculation. But a cost estimation relies heavily on the quality of the data involved. You can do simple 'off-the cuff' estimates that won't stand up to academic rigour but provide a flavour or estimates that don't require complex econometric methods or very complex detailed estimates. There are a range of options which depend on why you want the costing and its purpose and the level of data you have available.

I think that trying to work in a particular region of Ireland and trying to build estimates from the ground up would be really worthwhile doing. The other thing about costs is that not only are they about making the argument for resources, they are an important way of developing a monitoring system. There is a huge gap in knowing how effective our interventions are and this would allow us to effectively monitor. Costs are obviously an important element of a monitoring framework. I'm open to discussion on starting small and regionally and building up or being ambitious in reach from the start.