

## **'the personal & public cost of domestic violence' Conference**

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

### **Questions to Speakers: Second Morning Session, in response to Kylee & Jane**

**To Jane: Thank you for coming forward because those perpetrators are out there still and there is a huge fear of coming out and speaking up because of fear of repercussions. Despite all you have experienced you're still here and talking. Thank you very much.**

**To Jane: I just want to say that its refreshing that you're so critical of the services that exist and I think it's a good place to start from, if it doesn't work, you have to change it and I'm very grateful that you highlighted that.**

**To Jane from Conference Chair, Allison Aldred: What I'm hearing or taking away is the idea that what we really need to do is tackle underlying social norms. We need some kind of culture change campaign. I wonder what your thoughts are about how we might galvanise people to engage in some sort of campaign or initiative to start to tackle that.**

**A.** It reminds me of the drink driving campaign and how quickly Ireland adopted the – “It's not socially acceptable to drink and drive” message. That was because of consequences. There is no way until there are real consequences and until perpetrators are treated as violent criminals that there is going to be any change. I don't believe in mandatory sentencing because in the U.S. it's been a complete disaster causing human rights issues. But until we have consequences, until I'm not the one who has to leave an event because I feel unsafe and it's really about being able to say, “Actually you're an unsafe person, you have to leave.” It's down to the level of people acknowledging these are not monsters, they are not people with mental health issues - they are people that we like. The problem is that someone we like and care about is doing it to someone we know right now, that's the reality. We teach women to be afraid of things that are statistically unlikely, like stranger rape but if we were actually to be afraid in proportion to the reality of what is likely to happen to us then we would be afraid of the people closest to us and that's our challenge. There are massive things about the story that we tell about violence, domestic violence and violence against women - they are not separate - it's all part of the same category. I don't like to see sexual violence separated off and so was really happy to hear that in N. Ireland Annie's organisation are dealing with them together because violence against women is a culture of male entitlement. STOP making it about women.

**Q. To Kylee: I'm interested to know whether there are any studies into the mental health of perpetrators. We focus on the impact of domestic violence against women but what about the perpetrators mental health?**

**A.** Anecdotally, there's some discussion about perpetrators' being mentally unwell or psychopathic. We did a review of the prevalence of violence among people with severe mental illness and did not find any real relationship between mental health problems and perpetration of violence. And if you look at the general literature, you find that people that have severe mental illness are at considerably more risk of being a victim of violence than not. So we need to dispel some of those myths because it gives the impression that it's uncontrollable.