



# West Cork Whisper

WEST CORK WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER

55th EDITION

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## 13 million women at risk annually is not a small problem **it's an epidemic**

*The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights* have launched the results of one of the most far reaching and extensive surveys ever conducted into physical and sexual violence against women. Their survey, involved 42,000 interviews with women aged between 18 - 74 years of age in 28 EU Member states including Ireland during the period of Mar- Sept 2012.

To give you an idea how important this survey is and the necessity for it, here in Ireland the most recent statistics we have and which we are still using on violence against women dates back almost 20 years to 1995. Without relevant, current data it is impossible to assess the risk, convey the urgency or even more importantly, develop effective policy and responses to the issue of violence against women.

The findings make startling reading, the facts confirm that abuse of women and young girls is not confined to any specific part of the world but is of epidemic proportions right here in Europe.

- 13 million women in the EU had experienced physical violence in the 12 months before the survey.
- 3.7 million women in the EU had experienced sexual violence in the 12 months before the survey
- 9 million women in the EU had experienced stalking in the last 12 months before the survey
- The survey showed that two in five women (43%) have experienced some form of psychological abuse from a partner; this includes being belittled or humiliated, threatened, insisting on knowing where she is or who she is with, prevented from seeing family or friends, forbidden to leave the house or to go out to work.

### The results show that:

- One in three women in the EU (33%) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since they were 15 years old.
- In Ireland, 26% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15 (one in four).
- The survey results indicate that young women, as a group, are particularly vulnerable to victimisation.
- Also, 73% of mothers who have been victims of physical and/or sexual violence by a partner indicate that at least one of their children has become aware of the violence taking place.
- The survey asked its interviewees about experiences of abuse, sexual or physical before the age of 15 years old and found that 30% of women who have experienced sexual victimisation by a partner also experienced sexual abuse in childhood.
- In 97% of cases of sexual violence in childhood the perpetrator was male.

The condensed survey results run to 40 pages and as well as defining the violence used against women, it also points to the link between alcohol and increased violence against women; the increased vulnerability of pregnant women who have violent partners.

Nine out of 10 women would support the practice of health professionals routinely asking about violence when they see women with certain injuries. The research also shows that the characteristics and behaviour of perpetrators are linked to greater risks in violent behaviour, such as controlling behaviour in a relationship and placing restrictions on a woman's use of finances or contacts with family or friends.

Worryingly, in total, victims reported the most serious incident of partner violence in only 14% of cases and for a quarter of victims feeling shame and embarrassment was the reason that prevented their reporting of incidents.





# If a system doesn't work, shouldn't we fix it?

Jane Ruffino is an IT developer, journalist and a survivor of intimate partner violence. This is an extract of the presentation she gave at WCWAV's conference in Bantry last November.

Jane talks about how important it is for computer programs to work well for the people who are using them. Small problems need to be fixed but often bigger problems need to be replaced by a new program that does work. Sharing her own personal story she compares this work to her experience of the system when she experienced domestic violence.

*There are technical computer terms in this article, you may want to check the box of definitions before reading.*

My job as a marketing executive is to listen to customers. If our product is failing and if our customers don't know how to use our product then we are failing. We have to fix the product. When you have a technical product or a system, you fix the bugs in the system and make it useable. When a bug is so unfixable and so fundamental to the program, do you just decide that it is a feature and that users should work around it because you cannot be bothered to fix it? What that actually indicates is that your whole program is broken.

Ireland has a very poor user experience. In tech we would call this a two-sided business. We have the customer who pays for the product, in this case society, and the user, female victims of violence. The point of a two-sided business is to balance the needs of your users and your customers. If your users are not happy then your product is also failing your customers.

There is a huge gulf between my job and how I have experienced the system. The system in the largest sense; the health system, the criminal justice system, my professional and social spheres. And so often it's come back to that actually we live in a society that just hates women. Nobody's asking women who are experiencing this, what we want. Not a single organisation has

asked me in the last year and a half what I think could be better. I am asked for my opinion on a lot of different issues. Except this one. Nobody wanted to hear it.

Last year there were 12,000 cases identified by Women's Aid of domestic violence. And I was one of them. I only called them once because I didn't know what to ask so I just gave up and I never did it again.

My story: For about 2 years I was in a relationship with a very violent man. The first time he hit me he straddled me, he got on top of me in the bed and he let out this extreme scream and he went to sock me in the face but then he veered off and he punched me in the shoulder really hard. And I rolled over, and I thought 'this didn't happen', 'I've so much to do tomorrow'. And I kind of said over my shoulder 'you just punched me', and he said 'no I didn't', and I just thought 'I don't have time for this, I have to work', I had to go and be a grown up professional the next day. This was how it went. I knew the stories of women who'd been victims, I'd been a feminist since I was old enough to understand what it was. I'd seen it in my family, I'd seen it among my friends, I'd stood up against it. But I didn't relate to any of these stories, [or] the stories in the media. I was always part of the problem, 'I'm irrational', 'I'm a pain in the ass', 'I'm a drama queen', 'what he was doing really wasn't hitting'. All the stories that I knew about were these women who were sort of innocent and serene and took everything with quiet dignity. He would turn to me and say 'you're no Snow White'. And he was right. I'm an absolute terror when I'm depressed, when I'm scared. I'm a nervous wreck. I'm insecure. I cry when I think I'm fat... So I thought this is not describing me.

Then one night he launched at me from our bed, put me in a headlock and punched until he broke his hand. We were taken to separate hospitals. I got a bunch of stitches, he got his hand rebuilt. I got a barring order, he spent 5 days in the hospital. The only jail time he ever got was about 30 minutes in a cell. I took him back for a little while until one day I woke up and realised he was probably going to kill me. So I broke up with him before I could chicken out.

I got an unenforceable 3 year barring order. I have a stack of evidence of him breaching it, he has harassed me constantly since. The police don't want to know about it. He breached his barring order more times than I can count but the police genuinely treated me like every single incident was my fault except the one time he's being prosecuted for. I reported breaches of barring order, they were never investigated. When his case came up, his defence gutted my victim impact statement in court. There's little

public understanding of the nature of the criminal process when it comes to violence against women. You have no one to represent you in court. You are a witness in a crime against the State and you do not matter.

Judge Martin Nolan sentenced him to two and a half years, suspended on the condition that he pay compensation within a year. He paid on the very last day of that year and the cheque is now lost in the post.

My accountant has calculated that to date this has cost me approximately €42,000. This is lost work time, lost rent, therapy bills. It does not involve legal bills, time in effective hiding, communications bills, anything else. There are approximately a million and a half women aged 16 to 65 in Ireland, taking a conservative statistic of one in seven women experiencing extreme violence. If the cost per person is €42,000 that equals 9.4 billion. Add this to the council of Europe's estimation per capita of violence against women costs; this is hospitals, legal costs and criminal costs. That is €555 per capita per year in Ireland, €2.2 billion to the exchequer. The cost total to the Irish State is €11.6 billion every year.

I was completely denied my agency as a human being, and as a woman, and as a feminist. One of the worst things that could have happened was pretty much being stripped of my feminism by other feminists. I used to be a regular fixture on radio about women's issues and I have not been asked once since.

Everybody wanted the story of the one night that it was really bad and I was in the hospital and he bashed up my face. This focus on the extreme violence is to ignore the pattern. If I'm angry I get dismissed completely. It's okay if I cry, if I'm a nice little victim.

There are places I can't go and things I can't be part of. My geography and my psycho-geography has been contracted by my inability to feel safe, even in my own professional environment. Imagine all the women's contributions that are being denied to society, to the community, because they cannot afford to take a risk because they might die.

The language itself erases the perpetrator. We literally strip the language of domestic violence just down to the very minimum of agency. We need to use language that puts the responsibility on the person who did it. And not use victim blaming language.

Users are forced to adapt to working around features that the programmer has not fixed.

The real problem that we can't get around: your customers hate your users. That's a really bad feature. In tech if someone

doesn't know how to use my product then my product isn't working. I have to find out why and I have to fix it or it's a fail. The relationship relies on the fundamental thing that your customer wants to help your user. In the case of violence against women your customer does not only NOT want to help your user, your customer actively hates your User.

Let's look at what's out there: campaigns that focus on women and not on men; services that deny the individual agency of women; police focusing on individual instances of violence and they can't or won't address the pattern. Women's Aid has done a lot of great work, but I remember sitting the day after my ex's sentencing, and Women's Aid was launching balloons, I have never in my life felt so isolated from a group that was supposed to look out for my interests. There's no anger, and the patriarchy loves when we're not angry.

So I have been looking at other things. There is a pilot programme proposed in Sweden developed between services and users and involves police listening, linking up services and helps women to move on. My home state of Massachusetts has a risk assessment that actually assesses violent offenders for their likelihood to kill. My ex would probably have been very high on that list. Not a single case under this system has resulted in murder. What it does is it allows women to determine their own risk level and act on it, instead of being told to ask someone else if they're in danger. We could build some tech around this, with features like self-assessed risk status; friend check-in; messaging services; harassment recording; improved safety; increased independence. Based on 71% smart phone penetration in Ireland you could reach 159,000 people for the cost of what it cost me for one year of my life.

The bad news is that lack of tech is not the problem. The problem is the will to solve the problem. We're still making this a women's problem. We have to change the user experience by changing the culture. Ask users what our problems are. Help users solve the problems based on their priorities. Because when you have a good user experience for women everyone wins.

## Definitions

**TECH** - Technical knowledge or tools

**BUG** - A general term used to describe any unexpected computer problem

**FEATURE** - A fundamental part or aspect of a computer program.

**USER** - the person who is using the program, also refers to service users in this article



# sexual violence

The approach to tackling sexual violence against women in Ireland is similar to that of other countries. Women are strongly advised to avoid being raped. Women are advised to be careful about where they go, what they wear, what they drink, and the company they keep. And when they are raped they are often blamed for being raped. Women find themselves being criticised for where they went, what they wore, what they drank, and the company they kept.

The vast majority of women who are raped do not report the rape to the Gardaí—over 90% of them. When women do report being raped, sometimes they are not believed. Or they are believed, but the prosecution is not taken - less than 20% of

reported rape cases go to trial. Or at trial, the jury do not believe what the victim says; or if they do believe her, they still find the man not guilty because they think that whatever happened, it was not rape. Sometimes the sex offender will be allowed to pay his way out his crime. And sometimes, appallingly, the locals will gather in the court and queue to shake the man's hand after the guilty verdict.

The shocking facts are, that in Ireland 42% of women report some form of sexual abuse or assault in their lifetime. And 10% of women have experienced penetrative sexual abuse. 20% of women who have experienced sexual assault have been assaulted more than once by the same perpetrator; while 8% of rape victims have been sexually abused so often by the same-person that they have lost count.

People often think of rape in terms of "stranger danger", but less than 30% of sexual attackers are "strangers" to the women they rape. The reality is that over 70% of women who are sexually assaulted know their attacker. Not only do they know their attacker, all too often, they live with them. Nearly one-quarter of perpetrators of sexual violence against women are intimate partners or ex-partners.

Less than 8% of women who are raped report the crime to the Gardaí, and only 8% of those reported rapes

result in convictions. This means that, on average, there are only 64 rape convictions for every 1000 rape victims. This is a shockingly low figure, and yet, bizarrely, research shows that, in Ireland, 40% of people believe that rape claims are often false. Perhaps then, it is not so surprising that we have one of the lowest rape conviction rates in Europe.

The problem when it comes to rape cases is that the focus, and the blame, falls all too often on the victim, and what she is supposed to have done wrong. "Was she drinking?" "What was she wearing?" And while 85% of people believe that a raped woman is usually an innocent victim, yet still, nearly 30% of people believe that women who wear short skirts invite rape. No-one invites rape. Victim blaming is not only wrong, it is also dangerous.

Rape is not caused by what a woman wears, or by her behaviour. Rape is caused by rapists. Rapists are responsible for rape, so as a society we have to ask, why do so many rapists escape punishment? Why do we, as a society, minimise or excuse sexual violence? Sometimes people excuse rapists because they believe that he got carried away, or was overwhelmed by his desire - but this is to fundamentally misunderstand what rape is about. Rape is not about sexual desire; rape is about power and control.

Focussing on what the victim was doing, instead of on the rapist himself is very dangerous because research shows that a very significant number of rapists - both detected and undetected - commit multiple rapes; and they often sexually abuse children, and beat their intimate partners also. When a rape is reported to the Gardaí, rather than focussing on the actions of the victim, the Gardaí should focus on the history of the man accused of rape. They should interview partners, ex-partners, friends, and acquaintances because there is every likelihood that they will find that this is not a "once-off" occurrence, but is instead a pattern of behaviour.\*

Women should not be blamed for rape. Nor should women blame themselves for being raped. No-one should excuse rapists for raping. Women (and men) who are raped should report this to the Gardaí - and research shows that over the past three decades victims of rape are reporting in greater numbers to the Gardaí. And the Gardaí should focus on the sexual histories of the accused, because, chances are, this is not a once-off crime. Juries also need to be aware that just because a woman knows the accused, or is in a consensual sexual relationship with that man, or is married to him, that she can still be raped by him.

Rapists are sexual predators who seek out women to rape. Sometimes the women are strangers, sometimes they are friends or acquaintances, and sometimes they are work colleagues. Sometimes they are wives or partners or girlfriends, sometimes they are children, and sometimes they are other men.

Sexual abusers have patterns of abuse. As a society we need to educate ourselves about rape and sexual abuse, and recognise that rapists look just like other men. They are found everywhere, and in every walk of life. Of course not all men are rapists, not even most men are rapists - in fact it is a small minority of men who rape. But most men who rape, rape often. We need to identify these men, arrest them, prosecute them, and imprison them. And we need to stop excusing rapists for rape.

*\* Research on undetected rapists amongst college students in America found that while 6% of the male students had raped or attempted to rape, over half of those men, 4% of the total, had committed multiple rapes as well as other violent crimes—none of which had been detected. (Lisak, 2002)*

THE FACTS AND STATISTICS IN THIS ARTICLE WERE TAKEN FROM:

*Different systems, similar outcomes? Tracking attrition in reported rape cases across Europe.* 2009. Jo Lovett and Liz Kelly

*The SAVI Report: Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland.* 2002. Hannah McGee, Rebecca Garavan, Mairéad de Barra, Joanne Byrne and Ronán Conroy

*"Repeat Rape and Multiple Offending Among Undetected Rapists".* 2002. David Lisak and Paul Miller.

*"Understanding the Predatory Nature of Sexual Violence".* 2006. David Lisak.

All articles and studies are available on the internet.



## SENATOR TONY MULCAHY SPEAKS

On 20 Feb 2014 Senator Tony Mulcahy interrupted his own planned speech to the Joint committee on justice, defence and equality to share his personal experience growing up in a family with an abusive father. He spoke with passion and conviction and advocates for many changes in the response to domestic violence. "when a guard comes to the house, he should then be investigating a crime because it is a crime then, it doesn't become a crime after and that's what we've got to do".

To listen to the full speech go to <http://www.thejournal.ie/tony-mulcahy-domestic-violence-1323949-Feb2014/>

## WEST CORK COURT CLOSURES

Some of you might already know that there have been closures of 7 local Courts in West Cork in the last 10 years, the most recent being Kinsale in December 2013. The next scheduled closure is Skibbereen. Having already lost local Courts in Castletownbere, Schull, Dunmanway, Glengarriff, Millstreet, Coachford and Kinsale losing Skibbereen would be a catastrophic blow indeed. These closures have been promoted as an economical saving for the state however significant evidence proves otherwise.

Thankfully Solicitors of West Cork have been granted leave to bring a judicial review against the courts service in this matter and they have promised to take any action they can to have these decisions over turned.

Our society has a growing epidemic of domestic violence on its hands, and women and children are suffering because of it. We cannot let these court closures go ahead. In a legal system that is already hugely compromised we need familiar, accessible services i.e. local courts, social workers who are aware of clients backgrounds and available for court, we need effective protection for our citizens against these crimes. Our women, our children are our future, and every stance we make is a building block for their dignity.

For further information please go to our web site [www.westcorkwomensproject.ie](http://www.westcorkwomensproject.ie)

# notice board

## We would like to invite you to visit our website

Our user friendly website offers information, education and hopes to be a resource for all those affected by domestic violence. We have a frequently asked questions section, news and events and plenty of practical advice.

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

Online safety is a priority so please read the safety section on our website and only uses the computer if it is safe to do so.

We also have a facebook page that we would love for you to like but please keep your personal safety in mind.



## Advocacy Service provided by West Cork Citizens Information Service

Having access to independent, accurate information and a range of options from which to make choices can enhance the quality of opportunity and access to services of everyone in society. It can be difficult at times to assert and claim those entitlements. Advocacy is a means of empowering people by supporting them to assert their views and claim their entitlements and where necessary representing and negotiating on their behalf.

West Cork Citizens Information Service provides an independent information, advice and advocacy service and staff in its offices in Bantry and Macroom, advocate at different levels in relation to difficulties with access to social welfare, housing, health and employment. Staff advocate on behalf of clients in a range of ways, from negotiating complex information to helping people through the appeals process.

The main types of advocacy provided are as follows :

- Supporting Self Advocacy, including preparation of Appeals/Hearings
- Making telephone calls with / or on behalf of person
- Writing letters with / or on behalf of person
- Negotiating or Mediating in order to change a decision
- Representational Advocacy at a hearing/tribunal (where resources allow)

The service provided is free, confidential and independent. It is funded by the Citizens Information Board which is the statutory body responsible for the provision of information, advice and advocacy on a broad range of social and civil service to the public.

West Cork Citizens Information Service can be contacted by calling in to or telephoning the office at Wolfe Tone Square, Bantry ( Tel 0761 078390 ) or the office at South Square, Macroom ( tel 0761 078430 )

## notes from the conference

We are delighted to inform you that our conference "The personal and public cost of domestic violence" was a great success and we have now included on our website full texts of the speeches from the guest speakers. <http://westcorkwomensproject.ie/conference-2013/>

**Nata Duvvury** has more than 25 years' experience in international development and was a powerful dynamic speaker on the cost to the state of domestic violence and its consequences for all those impacted.

**Kylee Trevillion** spoke at length and provided fresh new insights from research she was involved in conducting into the links between domestic violence and mental health. Kylee works with the Institute of Psychiatry in King's College, London.

**Annie Campbell** was a beacon of hope when she spoke. She is director of *Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland*. She explored with the audience her experiences managing the 24 hour domestic and sexual violence helpline and the new programs they are utilizing to improve support with first responders, with women and their children.

The respect and support we all felt was almost tangible when **Jane Ruffino** spoke eloquently and with passion of her first-hand experience as a victim of domestic violence. She explained step by step the failing she experienced and made it very clear that our system is broken.

We were all much impressed by **MissElayneous** and the Youth rappers who performed for the audience before lunch. Dunmanway FRC and WCWAV collaborated on the Rap written and performed by the talented youngsters and sending the message that domestic violence is not cool.

On the afternoon panel were Inspector Ronan Kennelly, Dr Pat Bracken, Consultant Psychiatrist and Clinical Director of the Centre for Mental Health Care and Recovery in Bantry and Greg Lawlor, Principal Social Worker, HSE South. They each spoke of the resources and support currently available and the impact of domestic violence in their work and practices.

The thought that I move forward with was from the coordinator of West Cork Women against Violence: "between a rock and a hard place diamonds are made". The insights gained from this conference will have long reaching consequences. FR

Life shrinks  
or expands in  
proportion to one's  
courage

ANNAIS NIN





## TREASURER

West Cork Women Against Violence are looking for a Volunteer Treasurer!

The role of the Treasurer involves the general financial oversight of the organisation. The commitment needed would be four Board Meetings a year and four Finance Meetings. We will not be asking you to do the actual bookkeeping!

Contact our coordinator Marie Mulholland by phone on 027 53847, or by email to [coordinator@westcorkwomensproject.ie](mailto:coordinator@westcorkwomensproject.ie)

## we're here to help

If you - or someone you know - think we could help we're offering you this card to cut out and keep in your wallet for when you get the chance or courage to ring us. We've purposely made it discreet so only you will know what it is about. Trust us, Trust yourself

We are here to support you.

1800 203 136

# support services for women

## cork

West Cork Women Against Violence ..... Freephone 1800 203 136

Cuanlee Refuge, Cork.....021 427 7698

Free Legal Aid Clinic..... Locall 1890 350 259  
Information and referral

IRD Duhallow Domestic Violence Support..... Helpline 087 7733 337  
from Monday to Saturday 10am - 10 pm or office at 029 60633

Legal Aid Board, Cork.....021 455 1686 / 021 427 5998

Mná Feasa (Domestic Violence Project) .....021 421 1757

OSS, Cork..... Freephone 1800 497 497  
(Domestic Violence Resource Centre for men and women)

S.A.T.U.....021 492 6100

Sexual Violence Centre..... Freephone 1800 496 496

Domestic Violence Social Work.....021 492 1728

Y.A.N.A. North Cork.....022 53915

## kerry

Kerry's Women's refuge and Support Services (Adapt).....066 712 9100

Kerry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre..... Freephone 1800 633 333

Legal Aid Board .....066 712 6900

Tralee Women's Resource Centre.....066 712 0622

## national

Women's Aid..... Freephone 1800 341 900

## west cork citizens' information service

West Cork Citizens' Information Service can provide you with information, advocacy and advice on all your rights and entitlements. The service is free, confidential and independent. Open daily, please call for times.

**The Square, Bantry, .....076 107 8390**

**South Square, Macroom, ..... 076 107 8430**

**CIS Outreach, Dunmanway every Wednesday 10am - 1pm**

**Legal Aid Board - monthly on 3rd Tuesday 10.30am - 4.30am** - For an appointment with the Legal Aid Board please phone the Legal Aid Office on 021 455 1685

**Free Legal Aid Clinic - monthly on 1st Tuesday 6pm - 7pm** - For an appointment please contact West Cork Citizens' Information Service by either dropping in or phoning 076 107 8390.

**MABS outreach Clinic - Each Friday 10am - 11.30am** - For an appointment please phone MABS on 023 885 5155.

West Cork Women Against Violence Project, Harbour View, Bantry, Co. Cork  
[www.westcorkwomensproject.ie](http://www.westcorkwomensproject.ie) email: [admin@westcorkwomensproject.ie](mailto:admin@westcorkwomensproject.ie)