



# West Cork Whisper

WEST CORK WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER | ISSUE 77 | MAR, APR, MAY 2020

**- March 8th -  
Happy International  
Women's Day**



For more information about  
International Women's Day, see  
[www.internationalwomensday.com](http://www.internationalwomensday.com)



WCWAV supports the campaign to Save Bantry Hospital

Save Bantry Hospital

A recent article by US lawyer, Barry Goldstein called *Gaslighting by the Courts* summarises many of the continued experiences and abuses perpetrated against DV victims and their children in the courts systems. Goldstein has worked with victims of Domestic Violence for over 30 years. Although his article is based on the misconceptions and wrongly held beliefs of the US court system in relation to DV, there are familiar echoes in what he has witnessed in the US, here in our own Irish system.

# Gaslighting



# by the Courts

## 1. Abusers are cured by separation

Courts routinely assume the end of the relationship ends the abuse. Goldstein refers to research demonstrating that only accountability and monitoring have been shown to change abusers' behaviour but points out that courts wrongly continue to rely on separation and time. Here in Ireland, Professor Stephanie Holt often refers to the following quote 'Separation is not a vaccine against domestic violence' (Jaffe et al, 2003:29).

In WCWAV we see over and over again how abusers use the court process itself to continue the abuse, often in very subtle ways. For example, an abuser may seek to represent himself at a Safety Order hearing rather than securing a solicitor, which often leads to the case being adjourned on the day. The woman, in contrast, has often jumped through many hoops to get herself to court on the day, with a solicitor representing her. Often she has taken time off work, arranged childcare, arranged legal representation, filled in Legal Aid forms with all the necessary documentation gathered, not to mention having psyched herself up mentally for a court hearing, for it to be adjourned on the day, which means she has to do it all over again at a later date- so that

he can have representation. Repeatedly, I see the time waiting outside the court for the case to be called, used as an opportunity for him to intimidate, eyeball and indeed often terrorise the woman, often in very subtle ways, scarcely perceptible to anyone but the woman herself.

## 2. Only Physical Violence Matters

Goldstein refers to DV advocates insistence that physical abuse is often not the worst part of DV, but despite being experts in the field, have not been listened to because there was no scientific research to support their statements. Now, Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)\* research confirms that most of the harm from domestic violence is caused by the fear and stress that living with an abuser can cause. Nevertheless, very often the family courts continue to deny or minimize the importance of non-physical DV tactics. Professor Holt refers to the "white noise" that children living with coercive control experience on a daily basis. This "white noise" is in the background all the time, putting the women and children on edge, waiting for the next incident, interfering with sleep for children and young people, interfering with their development and learning. The Domestic Violence Act 2018 has introduced a new

offence of coercive control, which criminalises psychological abuse/controlling and coercive behaviour. This is a huge step forward in theory, but despite this, in the absence of physical abuse, Barring Orders are often more difficult to obtain.

## 3. Only Recent Abuse Matters.

Goldstein's experience leads him to believe that many Judges try to save court time by limiting evidence about abuse to some arbitrary period. Limiting the time frame, he says, means that the earlier incidents that the mother and child remember cannot be considered, which is a practice that helps abusers and makes it harder to protect children.

Goldstein's findings are backed up by the recent Womens Aid Report - 'Unheard and Uncounted' (2019) which speaks of years of abuse being reduced down to one or a few charges for recent and in some cases relatively minor incidences. It says that the impact of the cumulative abuse on the women is lost to the court.

## 4. Mothers are Suddenly Crazy

He points out that in a typical contested case, the father always wanted or required the mother to provide most of the childcare.

\* Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is the term used to represent a group of negative experiences children may face or witness while growing up. These experiences include emotional, physical, or sexual abuse; emotional or physical neglect; living in a household in which domestic violence occurs, or where a family member with substance-abuse or other mental disorder resides; parental separation or divorce; and an incarcerated family member.

When the mother decides to end the relationship and report the father's abuse, he responds by claiming that the mother is unfit and possibly crazy. Goldstein points out that in any other litigation the fact that he wanted her to care for the children would be seen as an admission that she is a good mother. She did not suddenly become unfit because she decided to leave her abuser. However, in the US courts this is often an accepted finding. In our work, I have seen it play out more in terms of access. For example, psychological reports sought by the court in relation to access often refer to mothers as being overly anxious, as being 'histrionic', when in truth mothers are often doing everything in their power to protect their child.

### 5. Father's public behaviour proves his private behaviour

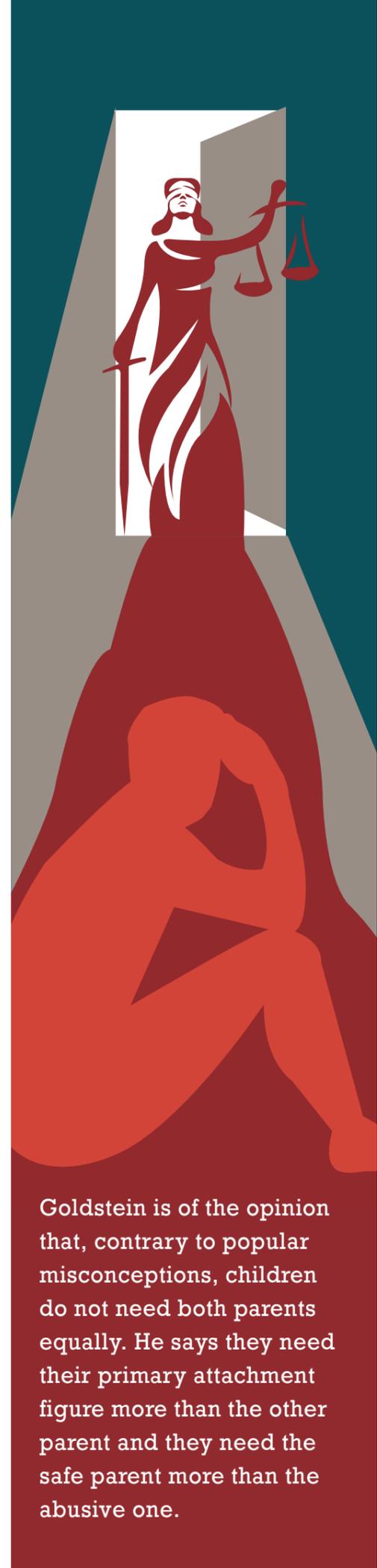
Goldstein says that if someone engages in abusive behaviour in public, we can be sure they also act abusively in private. Abusive fathers regularly use friends, family and co-workers to testify about what a nice peaceful man he is. This, he points out, tells the court nothing about how he acts in the privacy of his own home. The best source of information about an abuser and what he is capable of is his partner. Often the courts take what the victim says with scepticism, which leads to minimizing the danger presented by abusers even when the court recognises that he has committed some abuse.

### 6. Father's lack of personal knowledge repeatedly credited.

Goldstein points out that one of the many problems with unscientific alienation theories is the assumption that if a child does not want to visit the father, the only possible explanation is that the mother must be alienating the child. The courts often allow the father to supply the missing connection by testifying that the mother is saying or doing something to alienate the child. Goldstein's view is that as the father is no longer living in the family home, this kind of information supplied by the father must be hearsay.

### 7. Children benefit from having abusive fathers in their lives

Both in the US and Ireland, the fundamental problem in the family courts is that repeatedly courts force children to have unprotected visitation with abusers. This is caused by uninformed practices that cause courts to disbelieve or minimise true reports of abuse. Goldstein's experience is that there is a societal belief that children are harmed when they lose their relationship with their father. He points out that the harm is much greater when they are exposed to domestic violence or child abuse. Based on ACE research, children exposed to abuse will live shorter lives and suffer a lifetime of health and social problems. He believes that the best solution is to force abusers to change their behaviour if they want a relationship with



Goldstein is of the opinion that, contrary to popular misconceptions, children do not need both parents equally. He says they need their primary attachment figure more than the other parent and they need the safe parent more than the abusive one.

their children. He describes this as a win-win situation. In most cases, courts force children to maintain a relationship with an abuser and this causes more harm than good.

### 8. Courts can force children to 'Get Over it'

Goldstein says that the harm to children from exposure to domestic violence, child abuse, and other ACEs is that they live with the fear and stress that causes so much damage. Courts have the power to force children into relationships with abusers. This causes the children to push their fear deep inside where it will come out later in much more harmful ways. Many judges believe they are doing children a favour as they force a dangerous connection and destroy children's lives.

### 9. Court professionals are taught that contested custody is 'High Conflict'

In contested cases, a large majority of which are domestic violence cases, children are often forced to live at least part time with the abuser. This often means that they live with fear and stress. The courts demand a co-parenting relationship that is inappropriate and unworkable in DV cases. In many cases the counterproductive effort to keep abusers in children's lives results in taking safe protective mothers who are the primary attachment figures out of children's lives.

### 10. Courts frequently make decisions disbelieving mothers' abuse reports

Goldstein points out that courts continue to be influenced by the myth that mothers frequently make false reports. In reality, mothers involved in contested custody cases make deliberate false reports less than 2% of the time. In the US, the Saunders Study found that court professionals without the specific domestic violence knowledge they need tend to believe this myth and this leads to decisions that harm children. The Meier Study demonstrates that courts are believing alleged abusers far more often than other research would support.

### 11. Shared parenting used in domestic violence cases

The Saunders study found that shared parenting is harmful in DV cases. Abusers use decision-making to prevent any decisions the mother wants (particularly with regard to therapy for children). Saunders also found that abusers use visitation exchanges to harass or even assault the victim.

### 12. Child murders in contested custody cases

The Centre for Judicial Excellence found that over 700 children involved in contested custody have been murdered, mostly by abusive fathers in the last 10 years in the US. In many cases,

the courts whose practices err on the side of risking children, gave the killer the access he needed. The Bartlow study asked judges in communities where the tragedies occurred what reforms they created in the response to the local murder. The shocking response was none because they all assumed the local tragedy was an exception.

Goldstein is of the opinion that, contrary to popular misconceptions, children do not need both parents equally. He says they need their primary attachment figure more than the other parent and they need the safe parent more than the abusive one. He clarifies that this last statement is an objective conclusion based on valid scientific research while the misconception is based on subjective opinion uninformed by current research. He concludes that there is of course a benefit for children to have both parents equally in their lives, but this benefit is negated if one of the parents engages in domestic violence or child abuse.

#### REFERENCES

- Gaslighting by the Courts, Custody Court Crisis. Stop Abuse Campaign. Barry Goldstein, (2020).*
- The Saunders Study - US Department of Justice, Daniel Saunders, University of Michigan, (2012).*
- The Meier Study - Mapping Gender: Shedding Empirical Light on Family Courts, (2017).*
- Executive Summary of Womens Aid Report Unheard and Uncounted. Women, Domestic Abuse and the Irish Criminal Justice System, (2019).*
- Understanding and Defining Children's Experience of Living with Domestic Violence and Abuse. Professor Stephanie Holt. Trinity College. Community of Practice Seminar, Portlaoise, (2019).*
- Ace Study- Adverse Childhood Experiences study, (Felitti et al, 1998).*
- Childhood Exposure to Domestic Violence is an ACE.*

# women supporting women

Over the past year, WCWAV has run a monthly support group for women on their journeys through the domestic violence experience. While most people understand or have some idea what a support group is these ideas can be varied. So:

## What exactly is a domestic violence support group?

A support group is a group of women who have lived with domestic abuse, who have common experiences or concerns and who provide each other with encouragement, comfort and advice.

## What does a support group offer?

A support group can offer many things to different people, depending on why they are coming. It can help a woman to realize she is not alone and give her a safe space to identify and express her feelings. Many support group participants find that it gives them helpful information around concerns including practical tips, resources and strategies to help them cope. By meeting other members who are further along their journey with domestic violence it can provide hope for the future. A support group helps reduce stress, knowing you have a space to be heard or just simply held.

## I've never been to a support group before, I won't know what to do.

This is a common concern around attending a support group. Our group is run by a facilitator who can answer any questions you have beforehand and will be there on the day if you have any concerns. You don't need to have group work experience to attend a support group as it is a much less formal type of group setting.

## I'd like to come but I am nervous to share my story with strangers.

Again, this is a very natural feeling to have. Our facilitators can meet you one to one before the group to see how it feels to talk with someone about what you have experienced. Also, there is no pressure to share in the support group, particularly if it is your first meeting it might be helpful to ease yourself in slowly.

## I am in a good place; I don't need a support group.

While this may be a reality, a support group is a great therapeutic resource when you need it. Besides having a space to share, our support group has different sessions focused on ways to maintain your wellness (art therapy, Zumba), bonding with your peers (outings such as walks, lunch) and practical support (around budgeting, navigating courts with access). A support group can also increase self-understanding, where you might identify trauma that you may not have fully addressed.

Our support group runs in Skibbereen the first Thursday of the month. If you would like more information or are interested in attending (you must register your interest in the group before attending) please contact WCWAV @ 027 53847 and ask to speak with any of our support workers.



## Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) training for parents dealing with violent children

In December 2019, WCWAV resourced the delivery of Non Violent Resistance (NVR) Training in West Cork in partnership with CFSN. NVR is a model of intervention developed throughout Ireland to help parents cope with child to parent violence. Child to parent violence and abuse is an abuse of power through which children & young people aged 18 years of age and younger coerces, controls or dominates others in the family.

NVR is a practical, skills based program that involves looking at strategies to address child to parent violence. The aim of NVR is the reversal of power in families where a parent feels they are being emotionally controlled by a child-not just violence. Over two days professionals from all over West Cork were trained in the facilitation of a ten week NVR program for parents.



## Divisional Protective Services Unit for West Cork

Detective Sergeant Kevin Long, on behalf of the Divisional Protective Services Unit (DPSU) for the West Cork Garda Division:

"On the 30th of December 2019 the Divisional Protective Services Unit (DPSU) for the West Cork Garda Division was established. This unit will further enhance the policing service provided by An Garda Síochána to the population of West Cork. The DPSU forms a major part of Chief Superintendent Con Cadogan's commitment to An Garda Síochána's Modernisation and Renewal Program which is currently underway throughout the organisation nationwide. The West Cork DPSU will provide a consistent and professional approach to investigations of a number of specialised crime types including Sexual Crimes, Domestic Violence, Child Protection and Welfare, Online Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking. The unit will be supported by the Garda National Protective Services Bureau on an advisory level and linked in to other DPSUs that are currently being established in all Garda Divisions throughout the country. Initially the West Cork DPSU is staffed by Detective Sergeant Kevin Long and two Detective Gardaí, but this will rise to a full complement of two Detective Sergeants, ten Detective Gardaí and administration support staff on a phased basis throughout 2020.

All Gardaí assigned to DPSU have undergone specialist training over the last four months at the Garda College Templemore to deal with and investigate these highly sensitive and complex crimes while also bringing their own experience, knowledge and skills that these types of investigations require. The Unit is looking forward to working in collaboration with other agencies and support groups in the West Cork Garda Divisional area such as West Cork Women Against Violence Project and TUSLA providing support for the vulnerable victims of these types of crimes and safeguarding children. Cork West DPSU is committed to the provision of the highest standard of policing and victim engagement to those who are vulnerable and in need of their service.

The West Cork DPSU is based in Dunmanway town and covers all areas of the West Cork Garda Division. The unit can be contacted during office hours on 023-8856123 or via email [CorkWest.DPSU@garda.ie](mailto:CorkWest.DPSU@garda.ie) in all urgent cases victims are encouraged to make contact with their local Garda station or in the case of an emergency to call 999 or 112."

wonder

## women of west cork

Garda Sergeant, Kay O'Donoghue



**Where are you from?** Originally from Co Cork, I left for a short while to work in Tipperary and Kerry but I am back in Cork now for the past ten years.

**Job Title:** Garda Sergeant

**What does your work entail?** I currently work with the Chief Superintendent in Charge of Cork West Division assisting him in his Strategic role including working around our Annual Policing Plan, Inspections of his Districts and dealing with complaints from the public. Every day brings a new challenge which I enjoy.

**Why and how did you get involved in West Cork Women Against Violence?** Having served with AGS for the past 20 years, I have been involved in many cases concerning DV so I would have crossed paths initially with the project this way. In more recent years the project has been in a position to contribute in our Policing Plans for Cork West.

I have particular interest in supporting the project to acquire a safe house for victims of DV and was delighted that AGS were able to nominate WCWAV as the chosen nominee to benefit from the Garda Dinner Dance last November in Clonakilty.

**Since your first involvement with WCWAV do you feel things have improved for women experiencing DV?**

I believe it has. AGS are continually training our members so that they can give the best service possible to those affected by DV. In addition to this the development of our Divisional Protective Services Unit is a welcome addition since the end of 2019 and it is hoped that the community in Cork West will really feel the benefit of a dedicated unit to support them. Through our work together with WCWAV and Tusla I hope we see a vast improvement in this area locally. To answer this question in a broader sense I believe that DV is no longer an unmentionable subject in society and people in general want to help and support the women and children affected.

**How do you relax?** I love to travel and experience new cultures. I also love to go for a long walk when time permits in our beautiful West Cork where we are surrounded by some of the most beautiful beaches in the country.

**What changes would you most like to see for women?** I would like to see the changes that have commenced brought to fruition in all areas. Equal opportunities for every person should be a right not a privilege.

Be who you are and say how you feel, because those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind.

DR. SEUSS  
THE CAT IN THE HAT

# Musical talent abounds in West Cork and over the Christmas period, WCWAV were the grateful recipients of its generosity.



Left: Bantry School of Voice present WCWAV with a generous donation

Right: Ilen Vibes Choir present WCWAV co-ordinator with their large donation to our work.



Our profound thanks to all of these wonderful people for their invaluable support

**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

**Citizens Information Service West Cork**

Citizens Information Service West Cork 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.

**Bantry** The Square, 076 107 8390  
Daily from 10am - 5pm  
(Fridays until 4pm, closed 1pm-2pm  
Mon, Tues & Thurs)

**Dunmanway**, Ross House,  
The Square, Dunmanway  
Every Monday 10am-1pm

**Macroom** South Square Macroom,  
0761 078 430  
Mon, Tues, Weds, Thursday  
(Closed Friday)

**Bandon**, c/o St Michael Centre,  
South Main Street, Bandon  
Every Thursday from  
10am - 1pm & 2pm- 4pm

**Castletownbere** c/o Beara West  
Family Resource Centre, Unit 1,  
Knockanroe House, Bank Place,  
Castletownbere, Beara, Co.Cork.  
Monthly 2nd and 4th Thursday 10am-1pm

**Clonakilty**, c/o Employability Service,  
16 Rossa Street, Clonakilty  
Every Wednesday from  
10am - 1pm & 2pm- 4pm

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

jennydempsydesign.com

**CONFIDENTIALITY** West Cork Women's Project assures all women contacting us that four core values underpin our service:

- Confidentiality
- To be believed
- To be listened to
- Respect for her choice

Speaking to someone, perhaps for the first time, about experiencing violence or abuse in the home is never easy. Placing your trust in a stranger on the end of a phone or meeting someone for the first time face to face takes courage. These first stages of seeking support can be a time of stress and fear for women.

It is important that women understand that they have the right to remain anonymous when contacting the service. If a woman is comfortable with giving identifying details, these details are not passed on to any other agency except at her request.

There are two exceptions to confidentiality:

- If a disclosure raises concerns with regard to Child Protection issues
- If a woman discloses that she intends to harm another person.

We're here to support you

**FREEPHONE**  
1800 203 136

**Office** 027 53847  
Mon to Fri: 9 am to 5.30 pm

**Bantry Office:** 027 53847 Mon to Friday: 9.00 am to 5.30 pm

**Helpline:** 1800 203 136 during office hours

**Skibbereen Outreach:** 028 23607 Fridays 11.00 am - 2.00 pm

**Clonakilty Outreach** Thursdays by appointment

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