

Information Pack
Domestic Violence

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Introduction:

Domestic violence has been defined as “the use of physical or emotional force or the threat of physical force or sexual violence in close adult relationships. It can also involve emotional abuse; the destruction of property; isolation from friends, family and other potential sources of support; threats to others including children; stalking; and control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation and the telephone.”

Barnardos’ experience as a key agency involved in working with children and families, is that domestic violence is widespread in Ireland and is a serious social problem. Barnardos recognises that domestic violence takes many forms and can be perpetrated by various family members, however it is also our experience that the most prevalent form we encounter is perpetrated by males against their female partners.

While domestic violence is generally defined as violence between adults, children are all too frequently impacted on by domestic violence. There is a close relationship between the abuse of mothers and the abuse of children. In addition, while in recent years there has been greater attention to the effects of physical and sexual abuse of children, there has been less recognition of the impact on them of witnessing domestic violence. It is Barnardos’ view that the failure to recognise and address the effects of family violence on children is a significant gap in our child protection services. There is a clear need to vindicate the rights of children by protecting them from all forms of abuse and their effects.

Barnardos would advocate the need for a comprehensive study of family violence in Ireland, which would include researching the issue of the killing of children within families.

In this information pack, Sharon O’Halloran, Director of the National Network of Women’s Refuges and Support Services focuses on the effects of domestic violence on children and argues that lack of awareness about domestic violence and its consequences is prevalent among childcare and education providers and is one of the reasons why professionals fail to recognise children’s experience of domestic violence.

Denise Charlton, Director of Women’s Aid focuses on the impact of domestic violence on women and children and argues that the best form of child protection is woman protection. She also presents useful guidelines for good practice.

In her article, *Children and Violence: A Review of Research in the Area of Prevention*, Margaret Rogers from Barnardos argues that in spite of legislative, policy making and service developments, victims of domestic violence “often remain isolated, unidentified and unprotected”.

An excerpt is also included from the Policy Briefing issued by Barnardos in 2000 entitled “Responding to Domestic Violence and its Impact on Women and Children” which contains Barnardos’ recommendations on this topic.

Finally, our list of websites and contact details for other organisations should prove useful in terms of obtaining further information on this area.

The Effects of Domestic Violence on Children
By Sharon O'Halloran, Director NNWRSS
(National Network of Women's Refuges and Support Services)

The National Network of Women's Refuges and Support Services (NNWRSS) is the national representative organisation for refuges and support services working with women who have experienced domestic violence. The NNWRSS aims to be an agent of change in Irish society, a resource to its members (of which there are over 30) and a co-ordinator of agreed high standards of practices and procedures in services. The strategic priorities for the NNWRSS over the next three years are:

1. Building the capacity of the organisation as a resource to member groups.
2. Lobbying for social change, co-ordination of agreed practices and procedures in services.
3. Public education and awareness.

The NNWRSS is a member of the National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women and engages in social partnership through its membership of the Community Platform.

Domestic Violence

There is, in contemporary Ireland, the beginning of awareness in society of the prevalence of domestic violence. Domestic violence takes many forms and can be perpetrated by various family members. It is recognised that domestic violence is not confined to any particular social class and that it occurs in both rural and urban areas. In the majority of cases domestic violence is perpetrated by males against their female partners. Men are using violence to exert control over women. Women are its usual victims and men its perpetrators.

Domestic violence is understood to encompass mental, physical and sexual violence and in *The Report of the Task Force on Violence Against Women* (1997) it is defined as: *'the use of physical or emotional force or threat of physical force, including sexual violence, in close adult relationships...the term 'domestic violence' goes beyond actual physical violence...and can also involve emotional abuse; the destruction of property; isolation from friends, family and other potential sources of support; threats to others including children; stalking; and control over access to money, personal items, food, transport and the telephone.'* (p. 27)

According to Mulheir and O'Brien (2000) it is difficult to describe in a conclusive manner the extent and nature of men's violence against women because the nature of the violence itself isolates, terrifies and silences many women. Despite the fact that the issue of violence against women remains hidden and to a large extent underreported (Mulheir & O'Brien, 2000), a number of useful studies have been carried out in recent years mapping the extent and impact of domestic violence against women. Detailed studies have been undertaken both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on the extent of domestic violence.

The Report of the Task Force on Violence Against Women makes some effort to quantify the number of women who have experienced domestic and/or sexual violence based on the statistics of frontline services. In addition, key research has also been completed on the extent of violence against women in America and Canada, which lends strength to the findings of Irish research. In their study on the extent and impact of domestic violence in Northern Ireland, McWilliams & McKiernan (1993) found that up to one in four women experienced domestic violence at some time in their lives. This figure was backed up by the findings of Kelleher *et al* (1995) in the first comprehensive study of domestic violence in the Republic of Ireland. The study found that 18% of women reported having experienced violence by a partner or ex partner. Furthermore, 59% of respondents of the random survey reported knowing a woman who had experienced domestic violence. Meanwhile Kelleher & Kelleher (2000) estimated in their study of a frontline domestic violence service in Co. Mayo, that 2,500 women in the area were experiencing domestic violence at any one time.

Children as Witnesses to Violence Against Women

Whilst over the last 25 years we have begun to recognise the extent of domestic violence in Ireland we have not, until relatively recently, considered how children living in a domestic violent situation are affected. We have been slow to acknowledge that domestic violence impacts directly on children. Over this same period there has been increased acknowledgement of, and concern about, the effects on children of physical and sexual abuse but this has not tended to include the effects on them of witnessing domestic violence. This absence of focus on the effects of domestic violence on children has also been the case elsewhere and to date only a small body of international research has been carried out into this aspect of domestic violence. Additionally, many of the studies that have been carried out have had, as their focus, the long-term effects of the violence on children in their adult lives rather than its contemporaneous impact on them as children.

Why is this the case? We live in a society that respects the family unit and assumes that the family home is the most nurturing and suitable environment for children. Harry Ferguson tells us in *Protecting Irish Children – Investigation, Protection and Welfare* that perhaps the great paradox of Irish child protection during much of the twentieth century has been its family-centred ideology, focusing firmly on parents as joint carers. In relation to domestic violence it is totally inappropriate to view parents as a homogenous unit within the family and to consider the child's welfare in relation to her/his parents. This viewing of parents as a single unit is at best unhelpful and at worst dangerous in a domestic violence situation. Where abuse of a woman is taking place within the family not only is her physical and mental health likely to be at risk but her parenting capacity may be severely affected. Such a situation is referred to as '*mothering in a crisis situation.*'

We know that children who witness domestic violence suffer many of the same emotional and behavioural problems that abused children experience and have similar problems during adolescence and adulthood. How do we know this? In *Making the Links* 64% of women who experience violence reported that their children had witnessed the violence. In *Hidden Victims* we read that in 90% of the assault cases on women in the home recorded by the British Crime Survey (1992) children were in the same room or an adjacent room. The Children's Rights Alliance state in their report *United Nations Submission On The Rights Of The Child* that although research has shown that more than half the women who have experienced physical abuse say that their children have witnessed the abuse there is no comprehensive strategy to protect children from domestic violence.

In *It Hurts Me Too* Alex Saunders suggests that little attention has been paid to the children who witness domestic violence. He states that children who witness violence against their mothers do so in isolation and silence and that children quickly learn that to talk openly about this violence is either unacceptable or dangerous. He adds that this silence is compounded by a deeply entrenched cultural belief in western society that it is better not to discuss upsetting events with children.

Children are, more often than not, sensitive to the atmosphere in their home and in many situations see or hear the abuse directly or its consequences even when adults believe they have protected their children from it. Children are usually much more aware of what's going on than adults realise. Each child responds differently to domestic violence. Fear, distress, confusion and disruption are frequent effects. Children may feel ashamed or blame themselves for the situation. Some children have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares. Some children lose interest in school. Some children immerse themselves in schoolwork as a means of blocking out what they are experiencing. Some children try to help or protect their mother. Some children become highly critical of their mother and side with their father in their verbal abuse of their mother and in

physically assaulting their mother. Being exposed to domestic violence is likely to have both short-term and long-term effects on children.

Effects on Children of Witnessing Domestic Violence

Children living in domestic violence situations are themselves victims of domestic violence even in situations where they are not directly being physically abused. The negative effects on children of witnessing or overhearing violence are similar to the symptoms experienced by children who themselves have been abused. Research into the effects on children of witnessing violence against their mothers (short and long-term) is far from exhaustive. We know very little from children themselves about their direct experience of domestic violence. To date most studies have focused on what women perceive as the effects on their children of having witnessed violence, but without exception, all research that has been undertaken clearly supports the view that children are often deeply affected by exposure to violence against their mothers perpetrated by husband or partner. In essence, living with domestic violence can have a serious negative impact on the development of children.

Hurley and Jaffe (1990) describe how many children witnessing domestic violence exhibit a range of maladaptive behaviours including sleep disturbances, bullying, temper tantrums and an inability to concentrate. They indicate that some children fluctuate between extreme passivity and outbursts of aggression. Other children express feelings of severe anxiety, powerlessness and guilt at their inability to protect their mother or prevent assaults. The children studied who had witnessed violence at home had lower levels of social competence than their peers. Jaffe *et al* studied the relationship between behavioural problems in children, maternal stress and family violence in an attempt to isolate the impact of witnessing aggression/violence from other aspects of family life. They found this to be an impossible task and concluded that the emotional upset experienced by a woman following an assault could account for some of the symptoms of distress and behavioural difficulties exhibited by her children.

Silvern and Kaersvang (1989) asserted that in addition to the detrimental effect of living in families where, as a result of violence directed at the mother, there is inconsistent parenting and where maternal anxiety is high, the traumatic impact of the violence itself is sufficient to cause these children to suffer emotional stress. Jaffe *et al's* study also concluded that there was no common set of impacts or responses for child witnesses and suggests that how children are affected depends on their adaptational responses. Liz Kelly in *Administration* Vol. 44, No. 32, 1996 describes these responses as the ways children find to cope, to manage fear, anger and confusion. In her view what is also important is how each child makes sense of events; who, if anyone, they blame; how they cope and whether they see violence as a way of getting their own way or getting their needs met.

Within the broader context, the extent and range of the violence children witness will contribute to a heightening or lessening of their levels of distress. What children witness can range from verbal abuse to murder. Whether they themselves are directly abused, whether they experience the use of harsh and inconsistent discipline, whether the abusive man manipulates family relationships, the health of their mother, how she responds, the children's relationship with their mother and whether children have stable and positive relationships outside the family, will according to Kelly, contribute to a heightening or a lessening of their levels of distress.

Echoing Kelly's words, Peled and Eliat state that the relationship between violence and its affects on children is multidimensional and complex. The effects on children of witnessing violence are mediated by many personal and situation factors. These factors include the severity of the violence witnessed, whether or not the child is directly abused, the child's gender, age and race, maternal stress, length of time exposed to violence and child rearing practices in the home.

Peled and Davis in their analysis of a number of studies summarise the results as showing that children were found to show more anxiety, more aggression, more temperamental problems, more depression, less self-esteem and lower verbal, cognitive and motor abilities.

Despite this evidence it is important to note that children are not automatically adversely affected by domestic violence. Mullender and Morley observe that *'some children remain perfectly well adjusted...and that a majority survive within normal limits of functioning.'*

In *Silent No More* – a report by Women's Aid the case was made that frequently the full effects of the abuse did not appear until sometime after the woman had left the situation. Some of the ongoing problems that the women who participated in the research had to deal with were:

- The effects that witnessing the violence had on their children.
- Leaving the family home, which affected the relationship between women and children.
- Children having to settle into new schools, new communities and to make new friends.
- Women themselves attempting to avoid new problems and dilemmas stemming from social structures that lack protection, support and opportunities for women and children leaving abusive situations.

Meeting Children's Needs – What Can Be Done?

It is essential that support agencies (community, voluntary and statutory) distinguish between the abusing and non-abusing parent in relation to providing support for children. Such services need also to recognise that the non-abusing parent is one of the best sources of support for children in recovering from abuse. Unfortunately, awareness of the issue of domestic violence and its affects on children remains low among childcare service providers. Lack of awareness about domestic violence and its consequences for children is one of the reasons childcare workers, teachers, social workers, health workers and other professionals fail to recognise children's experiences. Violence against women has not yet been identified as a special issue in need of attention by child and family services here in Ireland. There is a clear need for all childcare agencies, and childcare providers to develop policies and guidelines in relation to violence against women, to undertake training regarding the effects on children of witnessing violence against their mothers and to ensure that domestic violence is on the childcare agenda.

Liz Kelly argues that many women in domestic violence situations do their utmost to protect their children from abuse, and from knowing about the violence they themselves are experiencing but that this form of 'protection' is seldom in children's or women's long term interest. Childcare providers could support women more effectively by adopting the philosophy that *'woman protection'* is frequently the most effective form of child protection. Training on the issue of violence against women and its affect on children would enable providers to support women to take steps to protect their children by protecting themselves through referral to appropriate agencies and organisations who could specifically support women to avail of options open to them. In addition, training would enable the workers involved with children to recognise the effects of witnessing the violence/living in a domestic violence situation and to deal with the resultant concerns and issues arising.

The effects of domestic violence on children's development and behaviour needs to be better understood in order for childcare providers, support services and others to respond with relevant, supportive and effective services. Refuges and support services around the country are keenly aware of the complex range of issues that arise in addressing the effects of domestic violence on children. While domestic violence refuges and support services have the potential to

offer critical interventions to children, the services offered by individual organisations vary widely and often are highly constrained by lack of funding. The NNWRSS is currently undertaking an extensive research project, which includes the service provision to children experiencing domestic violence. It is anticipated that the outcome of this initiative will give clarity on what constitutes best practice, principles and approaches for all services addressing the needs of children who experience domestic violence.

‘Woman Protection is the Best Form of Child Protection’ – Children, Domestic Violence and Child Abuse by Denise Charlton, Director, Women’s Aid

Women’s Aid defines violence against women within intimate relationships, or domestic violence as it is more commonly known, as a pattern of coercive control centred on all of the key aspects of a woman’s life. The use of violence and abuse by a man against his female partner is intentional and goal orientated, the goal being to gain and maintain power and control over the woman, specifically to ensure domestic and sexual compliance to his demands. We understand domestic violence as an issue of gender. Numerous research studies, statistics from police departments and crime surveys, indicate that 90-95% of perpetrators of domestic violence are men. Violence against women within intimate relationships occurs within the context of unequal power relationships between men and women at all levels of society.

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women states:

“Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to the domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of their full advancement, and that violence against women is one of the crucial mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position with men”

The definition contained within the Task Force on Violence against Women describes domestic violence as:

“...The use of physical or emotional force or the threat of the physical force, including sexual violence in close adult relationships. It can also involve emotional abuse; the destruction of property; isolation from friends, family and other potential sources of support; threats to others including children, stalking, and control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation and the telephone”.

Prevalence of Violence Against Women:

Violence against women is a feature of contemporary Irish life. Research findings from the national survey, *Making the Links*, illustrate that the prevalence of violence against women in the home in Ireland is extensive. The majority of women know a woman who has been subjected to violence by a partner and 18% of women reported that they themselves had been subjected at some time to violence and abuse, whether mental cruelty, threatened with physical violence, experienced actual physical violence, experienced sexual violence or had their pets/property damaged.

Women experience multiple forms of violence. Furthermore, the rate of reported violence is likely to underestimate the true level of violence. (Women's Aid 1995)

The following statistics outline the breadth of the problem:

- Women’s Aid supports 10,000 women a year through its National Freephone Helpline, Support and Information Service, Court Accompaniment Service, Arts Programme and Back to Work/Study Course for women who have left abusive relationships.
- In 1999, the 3 refuges in the eastern region accommodated 2,060 applicants, which included 609 women and 1,451 children. 1,104 women were refused refuge in this area in the same year. (Kelleher, 1999)
- There were 10,877 Garda call outs to domestic violence incidents in 2000. (Garda Síochána, 2000)

- 2,142 barring orders were granted and 4,586 applied for in 2000. (The Courts Service Annual Report, 2000)
- 8,150 calls were made to the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre in the year 2000. (Rape Crisis Centre Statistics & Financial Summary, 2000)
- 4 out of 10 women who had been involved in a sexual relationship with a man experienced violence. (Reported frequency of domestic violence; cross sectional survey of women attending general practice, February 2002)
- 83 women have been murdered in Ireland since the end of 1996, many of them by a current or former partner. (Media archives).

Every experience of domestic violence has consequences for the woman involved and her response will be affected by many factors, including age, class, race, status, disability, sexuality, previous experience of sexual violence, support available and other circumstances in her life.

Domestic violence has devastating effects on the lives of women. Women can suffer many losses as a consequence of domestic violence, loss of health, home, independence, trust, confidence, support, children and freedom. For a number of women it can even lead to the loss of life itself. Women's Aid media archives have recorded the outcome of female homicide trials in Ireland since the beginning on 1996. 40% of men convicted were partners or ex-partners of the woman. There have been a number of cases where the man has killed the woman and children and then committed suicide. (Women's Aid media archive).

Children's Experience of Domestic Violence

Research findings indicate that many children either witness domestic violence and/or are themselves subjected to physical violence by their fathers:

- Throughout childhood and adolescence, the majority of children living in circumstances of domestic violence witness the violence against and abuse of their mothers. In *Making the Links* women reported that 64% of children were in the same room when the abuse happened.
- Other reports indicate that up to 90% of children are in the next room when the violence happens.
- Many children themselves are directly targeted with physical, sexual and emotional abuse by the abuser. In an overview of American studies, in 32% to 53% of all families where women are being physically beaten by their partners, children are directly subjected to violence and abuse by the abuser.
- A study by Bowker *et al* (1988) found that men who beat their wives also physically abused children in 70% of cases in which children were present in the home.
- A study conducted by the Rotunda Maternity Hospital found that in a sample of 400 pregnant women, 12.5% had experienced abuse while they were pregnant.

Abusive men exploit their power as fathers or father figures to further control women. Children are actively used and drawn into the dynamics of an abusive relationship by the abuser. Being used as message carriers, being made to watch violence, being encouraged or forced to participate in degradation or abuse of their mother and being scapegoated or favoured by the abuser, are just some of the many tactics violent and abusive men use to control and abuse women. In most cases children live in an open climate of fear where the abuser exercises his control over the whole family by verbal and emotional abuse, threats and use of violence.

"I was constantly on edge. Never free, never safe. It was like, there was no safe place – being at home wasn't safe at all. It's just that's the place where you are and you're constantly alert. You don't sleep properly, you just sit and wait for something to happen".

Men's violence and control extends to the woman as a mother and indirectly and directly to children – violent men pose a risk to children's safety and damage children's physical, emotional and mental well being.

Violent men further establish control and power by:

- Undermining a woman's capacity to parent.
- Using children as part of their controlling tactics.
- Directly physically, sexually and emotionally abusing children.
- Threatening to take or taking children away from the woman.
- Threatening to harm or harming children.
- Threatening to tell or telling Gardaí or social workers that she is an unfit mother.
- Using access visits with children as a means of furthering the control and abuse of women post separation.

"She (Sophia's Mum) was doing his tea, but because it wasn't ready there and then, when he walked through the door, he got hold of her, dragged her on the floor, took her shoe and started whacking her on the head with the shoe. "He made her head bleed, so I grabbed a purse and I whacked it over his back trying to stop him from hitting my mum. He realised what he'd done, so I'd saved my mum's life really because he was going to kill her. I ran out of the house and asked our neighbour to call the police. I was five when I done that. What five year old would think of doing that?"

Impact of Domestic Violence on Children

Many women who contact our services who are experiencing abuse and who have children often talk about how they try to shield the children from the abuse. They talk of situations of having children in bed early so that they will not witness their father's behaviour toward the mother. Women often believe that younger children are unaware of what is happening to their mother and therefore the woman feels she still has some power over the welfare of her children. Unfortunately, women are often distraught when years later the children disclose that they knew from an early age that their father was abusing their mother, but felt powerless about what they could do about it. Many women who have left abusive relationships tell us that the catalyst for leaving was when the father started abusing the children.

Unfortunately, many children are affected by abuse in the home. Women often describe the behaviour of their children changing over the years because of what they have experienced and witnessed at home. The impacts of this experience include being fearful, being withdrawn, sleeplessness, poor school performance, and isolation from friends, acting out through aggressive behaviour and depression. Children may become abusive to the mother and replicate the father's behaviour to her. For many women, their children have been used as a weapon to further hurt and intimidate the woman. They can be encouraged by their father to call the mother abusive names and become disrespectful to her with their father's permission. Sometimes children can become withdrawn from their mother and the mother child relationship can be damaged. In a lot of cases some children can become over-protective and fearful for their mother's safety.

Contact and Access Issues

When women do leave violent partners or husbands, assumptions by courts and welfare personnel that child contact is in the best interests of the child can place the women and children in further danger. Many studies have shown that men's violence escalates post separation.

Women survivors with children who report continued abuse post separation, report that it is usually during child contact arrangements that violence and abuse is perpetrated by their ex-partner or husband.

A study focusing on child contact arrangements in England and Denmark found that:

"Contact between children and fathers who had been violent or abusive to the mothers tended not to work in either country. In the final analysis, the overriding problem was the men's continuing abusive behaviour to their ex-partners and/or children"

Women's Aid services have been increasingly responding to support, information and advocacy needs of women in relation to custody and access issues. Women who make contact with us for support and information tell us of decisions made through the courts that are damaging, impractical and upsetting to both the children and the mother. From our information there seems to be a trend in courts to grant very liberal access and 'shared custody' to men who are abusive to their partners. The issue of abuse is often not taken into account when there are children involved. The question of custody and access is seen as a totally separate issue to the abuse being experienced and the welfare and safety of both women and children is assumed to be secured because the woman no longer lives with the violent man. Women's experience and international research studies tell us that this is not the case. Many women continue to use our services post separation because of their partner's continuing violence and abuse, and statistics on female homicide indicate the level of dangerousness that women live with. In one study in the United States, 70% of women murdered were murdered by their male partner and over 50% of these were murdered post separation. Since 1996, 40% of female homicide victims have been murdered by partners or ex partners.

The access visit itself can be extremely problematic and used to further undermine the woman. There have been many cases where women describe the children being terrified of their father and being forced to go on access visits with them. There have been many occasions where women have contacted us in distress because the father has brought the children on an access visit and not returned. Women also describe children coming back from access visits upset and distressed because their father has used the visit to access information on the mother's life/activities and to verbally abuse and insult her.

Implications For Practice

Traditional social services responses to child abuse often work to compound men's exploitation of fatherhood and motherhood. Based on stereotypical views of women as solely responsible for child welfare and safety, many social service agencies fail to examine cases of child abuse in the context of the pervasiveness of male domestic violence. Despite ample evidence that "battering is the most common context for child abuse and that the battering male is the typical child abuser", many women report that social services responses focus on them solely, as the person responsible for stopping the violence and protecting their children from the assailant. Without an examination of who is the abuser and whether or not she herself is subject to violence and abuse, practitioners and agencies place the full onus on the woman to protect her children. A failure to do this is often responded to punitively, resulting in the removal of the child to care.

"Her dilemma is that she cannot protect her children unless she is protected, but if she speaks about the violence she fears, her children may be removed. Rather than tell this dangerous truth, women try to access child protection resources by suggesting they are 'unable to cope'. It is a bitter irony that this may result in precisely what they initially feared".

Such failure to recognise the dominance often exercised by men over their partners and to distinguish between the abusing and non-abusing parent occurs frequently in the investigation and 'management' of both the physical and sexual abuse of children and is detrimental to children's interests. Where both children and their mothers are being abused, the most effective way for workers to protect children is to try to make an alliance with the mother and give her practical and emotional support in protecting both the children and herself. An approach to child protection, which emphasises giving support to non-abusing mothers and other non-abusing family members where appropriate, allows many children who might otherwise be taken into care to remain at home. Treating both parents as a single entity makes it more likely that mothers will feel that maintaining a façade of unity with an abuser is the only way to avoid their children being taken into care.

In working with women who experience domestic violence, Women's Aid hold as key that the best form of child protection is woman protection:

"The protection and empowerment of women is the most effective form of child protection. This principle can encompass the fact that women and children's interests sometimes conflict, and that in some cases women may choose to give up the care of the children".

Good practice guidelines include:

- Don't ignore warning signs or your instincts about child abuse. If you think it is an issue, sensitively approach the subject with the woman.
- If child protection is an issue, inform women of your responsibilities under the child protection guidelines.
- Let her know you will support her and give her time to make a decision regarding her children's safety.
- Encourage the woman to approach social services herself should they need to be involved.
- Should you need to contact social services, inform the woman you are doing so and explain why. Show her all written documentation you are sending them.
- Continue to support the woman if social services become involved and advocate for her with them if requested by her to do so.
- Be aware of the increased risks of violence to both women and children post separation.
- Alert the woman to the possible escalation in violence to her and her children.
- Document and record all incidences of coercion, abuse and violence occurring in the context of contact arrangements.
- Ensure the court receives full evidence of the risk for women and children in awarding contact to violent men.
- Commit to the development of programmes for children either within your own organisation or in partnership with children's agencies.

Programmes for children can include information and advocacy services, support services which focus on empowering children to overcome the impacts of domestic violence, peer support services and preventative education. Frontline organisations have a central role in supporting the development of these responses to children who experience domestic violence.

WOMEN'S AID SERVICES

WOMEN'S AID National Freephone Helpline – 1 800 341 900

The Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline was set up in 1992 to respond to women who are living in abusive relationships. The Helpline is a completely confidential service. The aim of the Helpline is to provide support and information to women who are experiencing physical,

emotional and/or sexual abuse by their partner. Women who contact the Helpline are often experiencing multiple forms of abuse and living in extreme fear. As well as our National Freephone Helpline we also provide an appointment based one-to-one service, court accompaniment service and referral to other agencies such as refuge, if necessary.

All our volunteers and staff are highly trained and skilled in understanding the obstacles and fears of the women. Our analysis is based on a framework which identifies violence against women as an issue of power and control that men have over women.

Information & Support Service

Staff will provide information as necessary to inform a woman of her rights and entitlements. The aim is to broaden the range of choices available to a woman when she is making decisions that will affect the future safety of both her and her children. Information will typically be on areas such as accommodation options, legal options and social welfare entitlements.

The services offered are underpinned by a consistent non-directional support that values the woman as the director of her own life choices. This support is available from the time the person first makes contact until she no longer needs the service. It is recognised that this may take one or two visits to the service or it may involve on-going one-to-one support and/or phone contact over years.

The Support and Outreach Service has an advocacy element that recognises that in addition to providing information, women who have experienced abuse may require the skills of an advocate to negotiate these entitlements on their behalf.

The service is available by appointment at our premises in Cabra, and at our outreach centres in Dun Laoghaire, Swords and Coolock. Women will most frequently access the service by making appointments through our Helpline.

Court Accompaniment

A staff member will work with a woman before a court hearing. This involves detailing with her, her history of abuse, explaining legal terms and outlining for the woman the typical procedures and steps involved in a court hearing. The staff member will then accompany this woman to court, continuing to support her and, if necessary, liaising with the court guards to provide her with protection against an abusive partner. At the end of the hearing the staff member will be available to explain the details and implications of the court decision and discuss any further steps necessary.

Referral

Depending on individual needs, women may be referred to the different agencies that staff liaise with. These agencies would include refuges, local authority and specialised housing agencies, legal, medical and social services as well as agencies that relate to the particular needs of minority groups.

Children and Violence: A Review of Research in the Area of Prevention
By Margaret Rogers, Regional Manager, Barnardos Mid Western Region

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is the physical, sexual, or emotional abuse of a family member by another family member. It is a worldwide problem that transcends class, race, and to some degree gender. The most common and widely recognised type is violence against women by their husbands or male partners. However, women also may abuse their husbands, lesbians and gay men may be abused by their partners, children may abuse their parents or siblings, and parents may abuse their children. Studies in the UK, USA and Ireland estimate prevalence among women at anything from 20-30% of the population; among men from 7-15% and many have found that where domestic abuse occurs, children are present in over 60% of cases. The FBI reports that of every 100 women who are murdered, 30 die at the hands of their partners. Only 6 of every 100 men murdered die at the hands of their partners. A study of the violent deaths of 27 women in Ireland between 1995 and 1998 revealed that 14 (52%) were murdered by their current or ex-partners, and a further 8 (30%) were murdered by men known to them.

Responses to domestic abuse have been developed on a worldwide scale. Legislation has been passed, related protocols developed, voluntary and statutory networks and policy making foray have been established, support and treatment services have been set up. However, in spite of these developments victims often remain isolated, unidentified, and unprotected. A disabling social stigma persists, in which secrecy and minimisation flourish and responsibility to address the issue or seek help is left to those least able to do so. Among minority groups, such as Travellers who already experience exclusion, discrimination and prejudice, accessible and appropriate responses such as viable alternative accommodation are virtually non-existent.

Domestic abuse impacts severely on all its victims, most frequently women and children, at many levels. It is not just a legal problem. It also gives rise to serious physical and mental health problems. Abused women suffer more injuries that need medical assistance than all the victims of rapes, assaults and accidents combined. Abused women are more likely to be depressed than non-abused women. Children who witness abuse in the home are more likely to have emotional and behavioural problems as they grow than children reared in non-violent homes.

Effects of Domestic Abuse on Children

Witnessing abuse in the home has become known as “second hand abuse,” because it has so many negative effects on the witnesses. The impact of exposure to violence on children can be devastating, particularly so when it occurs during early childhood. Children’s healthy development depends on experiencing consistently nurturing and emotionally responsive care. Children’s worlds are limited; they depend a great deal on the stability of their household and family and they do not understand adult problems. They are highly sensitive, especially in regard to anything that can affect the stability of their limited world. For children who live in violent homes this is often disrupted and therefore unreliable.

A study undertaken by the University of Washington in Seattle found that children who witness their mothers' abuse by a father or other intimate partner are more likely to experience multiple school and health problems, even if the children aren't abused themselves. The study investigated 153 children in Seattle public schools whose mothers reported abuse by an intimate partner (including spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, or other sexual partner) to the police or the legal system. Using school records, the researchers gathered information about whether the child had been suspended, had been expelled, had frequent absenteeism, had required special education services, or had been retained in a grade. In addition, the researchers gathered information about how often the child visited the school nurse, the reasons for the visit, and how often the child

was sent home from school for illness. The school and health information about the children of abused mothers was compared to information from a group of children whose mothers had not reported abuse.

20% of the children whose mothers were abused had been abused themselves. Children whose mothers were abused were more likely to be frequently absent from school. Those whose mothers were abused and who had been abused themselves were twice as likely to have been frequently absent or suspended from school. Children whose mothers were abused were 60% more likely to have had a nurse visit that resulted in them being sent home from school, compared to children whose mothers did not report abuse. Speech problems were also seven times more likely to occur among children whose mothers were exposed to abuse, when compared to children in the comparison group.

Children who experience persistent violence often can and do display many of the following characteristics. They:

- *become violent themselves and learn to abuse others*
- *feel abandoned emotionally*
- *Live in constant fear*
- *Experience constant anxiety*
- *Feel powerless*
- *Develop low self-esteem*
- *Have behavioural problems*
- *Become depressed*
- *Are isolated*
- *Take on adult roles prematurely*
- *Suffer from stress and flashbacks*
- *Learn extreme behaviour*
- *Have problems in school*
- *Have nightmares*
- *Can't concentrate*
- *Are sick a lot*
- *Hurt themselves*
- *Contemplate, talk about or attempt suicide*
- *Destroy things*

Children may have a variety of reactions when witnessing domestic violence. In some instances children take on responsibility for the violence and place themselves at greater risk by trying to assume the role of protector for a parent or as mediator between parents. In some instances they may try to manipulate the situation for their own benefit and may be encouraged to play one parent off against another. Older children may resort to abusing alcohol or drugs or leave home to escape the tension. In between episodes, and particularly during characteristic “honeymoon” periods when there is a cessation of violence, children, although relieved, can be very confused and not know if they can trust either parent. Children who witness violence in the home may internalise lessons of identity. Girls learn that being abused is acceptable, possibly even a sign of love, so they will allow this behaviour from their future boyfriends/partners. Boys learn that beating the woman they love is acceptable behaviour, therefore perpetuating the cycle of violence across generations. Children often develop coping strategies many of which tend to exacerbate their difficulties. They may externalise or “act out” their feelings, often attracting negative responses from adults and peers. Others may “internalise” their feelings resulting in long term and painful consequences.

Early Childhood Development & Violence Prevention

To understand the crucial link between early childhood development and violence prevention, it is necessary to understand that:

- **Early childhood is a critical time** during which essential intellectual and emotional abilities form. Keeping young children safe and nurturing them is protective against lifelong problems, including the risk of becoming involved in violence.
- **Early experiences impact brain development**, shaping the brain's physical growth and sculpting neural connections. This occurs primarily between birth and school age years, when every encounter a child has or lacks is formative.
- **Violence affects young children**, resulting in a 're-wiring' of the child's brain in which survival skills are preferentially developed at the expense of learning and other social skills.
- **Family, community and society** are powerful in shaping young children's development.

A great deal of knowledge and expertise about the causes of violence and how to prevent it has been developed. While violence is part of daily life in far too many homes and communities throughout the world, there is an opportunity to make significant strides in preventing it. Taking advantage of this opportunity means starting as early as possible, before violence is learned or reinforced. A wide range of people, including government departments, statutory bodies, policy makers, academics, child development experts, practitioners, are becoming increasingly aware of the impact of violence on young children and the relationship between violence prevention and the healthy development of young children. Early experiences – those that take place prenatally and through the first 5 years of life – impact upon the rest of an individual's life. Thus, the first steps to preventing violence require action in these early years.

A growing body of evidence shows that:

- 1) Supporting healthy early childhood development is an essential element in preventing violence; and
- 2) Protecting young children from experiencing violence, as victims or witnesses, is an essential part of ensuring their healthy development.

First Steps – Taking Action Early to Prevent Violence

Based on extensive research over the last decade, The Prevention Institute has developed a multi-layered approach to prevention of violence in early childhood. The model outlines a 6 level strategy ranging from individual providers, community, organisational practices, social service systems and policy and legislation. Their research on violence prevention resulted in the understanding that violence prevention needs to start earlier and that acting as early as possible in the first 5 years of life is critical to success. Despite the potential benefits of implementing violence prevention strategy with young children, inadequate attention has been given to what can be done in the early years. **First Steps** captures and shapes what is known about the intersection of early childhood development and violence prevention into a coherent strategy – the **Three Keys to Violence Prevention**. Pulling together the range of information from research and practice, First Steps is a tool enabling policy makers, funders, service providers, administrators, parents and advocates to take action that will make a difference in both the current lives of young children and in their future.

The Three Keys to Violence Prevention

Key 1 – Violence is complex and requires a comprehensive approach.

The determinants of violence are multiple, complex and often interrelated. Success in addressing these problems is more likely when practitioners work across disciplines and address multiple

issues at a time. A successful strategy must include the collaboration and mobilisation of a broad group of individuals and a range of activities that link with, build upon and add value to each other. To understand the necessary range of activities, violence prevention practitioners have used the **Spectrum of Prevention**, a 6-point tool that enables individuals, agencies and coalitions to develop a comprehensive plan building on existing efforts within services, communities and social service systems.

1. Strengthening Individual Knowledge & Skills

- ✓ Provide caregivers with information about child development and teach them stress management, problem solving and boundary setting skills, and positive communication and discipline techniques.
- ✓ Build developmentally appropriate literacy skills in young children, for example, by encouraging caregivers to read to children frequently and providing books and other resources that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate.

2. Promoting Community Education

- ✓ Educate community members about the vulnerability of young children and the detrimental effects of abuse, neglect, and witnessing violence.
- ✓ Ensuring that children do not have access to weapons, to violent images or to situations that condone use of violence in resolving disputes.

3. Educating Providers

- ✓ Train childcare providers to model appropriate behaviours, understand how cultural beliefs influence behaviour and socialisation, provide consistent discipline, and offer a range of developmentally appropriate activities that support each child's unique learning style.
- ✓ Ensure that childcare providers are made aware of the prevalence and impact of violence on young children and are sensitive to behaviours which indicate that children have experienced or witnessed violence.
- ✓ Ensure that professionals who work with young children and families are trained to identify substance abusing caregivers and affected children and provide them with developmentally and culturally appropriate care and support.

4. Changing Organisational Practices

- ✓ Incorporate violence screening and assessment tools into existing healthcare protocols and training and promote their use to increase identification and intervention with pregnant women, caregivers, and young children who are at risk of violence.
- ✓ Contact television stations, advertising sponsors, and other media outlets, encouraging them to incorporate less violent and inappropriate content in children and family programming.

5. Fostering Coalitions & Networks

- ✓ Foster collaboration between city planners, transportation and housing authorities, law enforcement, business leaders, funders, and health and education service providers in the development of neighbourhoods and services that promote young children’s health and well-being.
- ✓ Foster partnerships that increase young children's access to positive male role models, including fathers and father figures. Partner with community organisations and networks to involve boys and young men in activities promoting interpersonal respect and co-operation.

6. Influencing Policy & Legislation

- ✓ Advocate for a per-child tax credit for all families with young children and for the provision of services such as subsidised community childcare, housing and accessible transport to low-income families with young children.
- ✓ Advocate for policies that support family mental health, including expanding health services to include infant and parental mental health and provide adequate training to ensure quality programmes and services.

Key 2 – Risk and resiliency factors must be addressed.

Individuals, families and communities have an enormous capacity to contribute to the resolution of the challenges they face, including violence. Successful violence prevention requires the strengthening of resiliency factors that protect and support children, families and communities, as well as the reduction of risk factors that threaten their well-being.

| Community and Structural Factors | Risk | Resiliency |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| | Poverty and economic disparity | Community networks and leadership |
| | Bias and discrimination | Financial resources |
| | Community deterioration | Empowerment and decision-making avenues |
| | Media violence | Community facilities |
| | Access to weapons | Health education and social services systems |
| | Gender socialisation | |
| Individual and Family Factors | Prenatal risk, toxins and poor nutrition | Good physical and mental health |
| | Child abuse and neglect | Positive attachments |
| | Negative family dynamics | Emotional competence |
| | Alcohol and other drug abuse | Cognitive competence |
| | Witnessing violence | Self-esteem |
| | Illiteracy and poor academic achievement | |

Key 3 – Violence prevention requires an integrated strategy for action

Successful violence prevention integrates an understanding of the complex issues, policies and systems that affect children, families and communities into an action plan that strategically coordinates support and strengthens multiple efforts.

Health insurance coverage to include infant and parental mental health and providing adequate training to ensure quality services and programmes.

Recommendations for integrated action:

- 1) Provide families with services and supports to foster health and empowerment.
- 2) Recognise poverty as a significant risk factor and take steps to minimise its impact.
- 3) Prevent and reduce the impact of abuse, neglect and witnessing violence.
- 4) Increase wellness opportunities and access to quality healthcare for children and families.
- 5) Promote mental health and meet the mental health needs of all family members.
- 6) Reduce substance abuse among caregivers and pregnant women and their partners.
- 7) Provide affordable, available and high-quality early care and education.
- 8) Improve the ability of families, communities and schools to prepare children for school.
- 9) Implement measures to reduce young children's access to weapons.
- 10) Reduce the impact of media violence on young children.
- 11) Intervene in early bullying behaviour and address underlying causes.
- 12) Increase children's opportunities for appropriate play and creative exploration.
- 13) Enhance community connections, resources and access to information and decision-making.
- 14) Increase local co-ordination of services and resources for families and their children.
- 15) Ensure that violence prevention efforts for young children are driven by effective strategy.

The evidence is overwhelming: barriers to positive, healthy early childhood development and early experiences of violence inversely affect children in ways that persist far beyond childhood, impacting brain development, academic achievement, relationships and the risk of being involved in violence. It is critically important to foster healthy development and prevent violence from occurring by reducing risks and fostering resiliency, working collaboratively and comprehensively addressing underlying issues. Ensuring that young children have the supports and opportunities they need and deserve is a priority that requires great commitment. It is up to every one of us to take action – to take the first steps toward healthy child development and violence prevention.

Barnardos Response to Domestic Violence and its Impact on Women and Children

Barnardos is particularly anxious to see services developed for children affected by domestic violence. To help children properly, developments are required at a number of levels. Accordingly, Barnardos recommends:

At a national level

- That ongoing awareness programmes be developed, highlighting the problem of domestic violence.
- That concerted efforts be put in place to promote the rights of children and adherence to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- That a national initiative be put in place to promote positive alternatives to the physical punishment of children.
- That modules be introduced into schools promoting the concept of ‘violence free’ schools and incorporating violence awareness and education programmes.
- That the regional committees established to prepare local domestic violence strategies be properly resourced and that each regional committee be requested to develop specific responses to children affected by domestic violence.

With regard to service responses to domestic violence

- That additional refuge spaces be provided and that each refuge be properly resourced so that it can cater for families and provide necessary child care services.
- That supported housing developments are complemented with the provision of permanent housing by local authorities.
- That each regional committee develops training and other supports for ‘front line’ staff who may deal with domestic violence, and that closer links and co-ordinated responses be fostered between different services at regional and local level.
- That services such as MOVE and the Cork Domestic Violence Project be developed in each region.
- That specific and culturally appropriate services for Traveller women and children be promoted at national level and in each region, and that particular strategies be put in place to improve linkages between relevant agencies and Traveller groups on this issue.

With regard to specific services for children

- That each refuge has the services of skilled child care workers who can support children and develop appropriate programmes for them.
- That specialised counselling services be provided for children who are seriously traumatised.

- That 'outreach' child care workers be available to refuges, or other services so that children can be supported when they leave refuges.
- That refuges and other community services be supported in the development of group based programmes for children.
- That specialised counselling services are developed in each region.

Websites, Contact Details and Resources for further information:

Barnardos National Children's Resource Centres:

Christchurch Square, Dublin 8

Tel: 01 4549699

Fax: 01 4530300

Email: ncrc@barnardos.ie

18 Patrick's Hill, Cork

Tel: 021 4552100

Fax: 021 4552120

Email: ncrc@cork.barnardos.ie

10 Sarsfield St, Limerick

Tel: 061 208680

Fax: 061 440214

Email: ncrc@midwest.barnardos.ie

River Court, Golden Island, Athlone

Tel: 0902 79584

Fax: 0902 79585

Email: ncrc@athlone.barnardos.ie

41 – 43 Prospect Hill, Galway

Tel: 091 565058

Fax: 091 565060

Email: ncrc@galway.barnardos.ie

<http://www.barnardos.ie/>

The Barnardos policy briefing "Responding to Domestic Violence and its Impact on Women and Children" may be referenced in any of our centres. The Autumn/Winter 2002 edition of ChildLinks from which several of the articles in this information pack are taken is also available.

Amen

1 Brews Hill

Navan

Co. Meath

Tel: 046 23718

Fax: 046 23718

Email: amen@iol.ie

Website: www.amen.ie

A confidential helpline and support service for male victims of domestic abuse and their families.

Move Ireland (Men Overcoming Violence)

Carmichael Centre

North Brunswick Street

Dublin 7

Tel: 01 8724357

Fax: 01 8735737

Provides support for men who are trying to overcome violence.

National Network of Women's Refuges and Support Services

**St. Mary's Square
Athlone
Co. Westmeath
Tel: 0872216328**

The National Network of Women's Refuges and Support Services (NNWRSS) represents refuges and support services that are working in the area of violence against women. Our vision is of a society that promotes equal rights for women and children and in which there is zero tolerance of violence.

**Women's Aid
Everton House
47 Old Cabra Road
Dublin 7
Tel: 01 8684721
Helpline: 1800 341 900 (10am to 10pm seven days a week)
Fax: 01 8684722
Email: info@womensaid.ie
Website: www.womensaid.ie**

Women's Aid is a voluntary organisation which provides advice, information and support to women who are being physically, emotionally and/or sexually abused in their own homes. The organisation supports approximately 9,000 women annually through a variety of services. Support and advice is provided to women in city centre and community locations in the greater Dublin area on financial, legal, housing and social welfare matters. Creative personal development programmes are provided to women and children who have been abused.