



# What would you do?

Brief for February 2017 theme for the localisation of the National Awareness Campaign 'What Would You Do?'

# Male Victims of Domestic Abuse

The National Awareness Campaign as part of the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021



## Recognising Domestic Abuse Against Men

Domestic violence /abuse is an increasingly important topic in public debate both in Ireland and in the international community. While in the past the discussion of domestic violence has been framed principally with respect to violence against women, men can also be victims of violence in the home and in relationships. The current government awareness campaign on domestic violence *What would you do?* recognises that both men and women are victims of such violence.

Domestic abuse has been described as the use of physical or emotional force or the threat of physical force, including sexual violence in close adult relationships, in order to control the victim. This definition holds true for acts carried out against men, either in heterosexual or homosexual relationships.

The term ‘domestic abuse’ goes beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve 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.

Domestic abuse is a major issue that profoundly affects the physical, emotional, social and financial wellbeing of individuals and families. It is perpetrated against a person by that person’s spouse, intimate partner, ex-partner, other family members and/or another person at home. Domestic violence is not an isolated, individual event, but rather a pattern of repeated abusive and controlling behaviours that take place within an intimate or family-type relationship and may even continue after the relationship has ended.

### Research on Domestic Violence against men

**Watson and Parsons (2005)** definitive piece of research on domestic violence carried out for the National Crime Council has given us some information on the gender prevalence of domestic violence in Ireland. The study found that:

- 15% of women and 6% of men suffer severe domestic abuse
- 29% of women and 26% of men suffer domestic abuse when severe abuse and minor incidents are combined
- 13% of women and 13% of men suffer physical abuse or minor physical incidents
- 29% of women (1 in 3) and only 5% of men (1 in 20) who experience abuse report to the Gardaí.
- The study suggested that in the region of 88,000 men and 213,000 women in Ireland have been severely abused by a partner at some point in their lives.



## Recognising Domestic Abuse Against Men

With regard to men:

- 1 in 16 men have experienced severely abusive behaviour of a physical, sexual or emotional nature from a partner at some point in their lives.
  - 4% of men experienced severe physical abuse
  - 3% of men experienced severe emotional abuse
  - Emotional abuse is considered the “worst thing” by nearly half of those severely abused.
- Only 1 in 10 men who had been severely abused talked to a counsellor about it.
- Most men who had been abused were abused by a female partner
- 2% of men had to take time off work because of a partner’s abusive behaviour.
- Almost 1000 men who were living with an abusive partner and moved out had to rely on emergency accommodation.

While, at first glance, some of the Watson and Parsons findings seem to suggest that women and men experience similar levels of domestic abuse when severe abuse and minor incidents are combined, one must bear in mind that the impact and severity of abuse experienced by women is much greater than that by men, particularly for more severe behaviours. That said, men, like women, deserve protection against these abuses.

**A recent Eurobarometer** Europe wide survey aimed to assess the perceptions of EU citizens about gender-based violence. It found that:

- 53% of people in Ireland think that domestic violence against men is either “very” or “fairly” common.

This compares to the **Horgan et al study on Attitudes to Domestic Abuse in Ireland (2008)** which found that 42% of those surveyed believed that domestic abuse of men is a “very” or “fairly” common phenomenon in Ireland.

Other findings from this study with regard to men are:

- 21% reported knowing of a male victim of domestic abuse.
- When referring to emotional harm as a result of domestic abuse, 36% believed that both men and women suffer equally and 45% thought that the level of fear experienced is also equally bad for both.



# Recognising Domestic Abuse Against Men

Domestic abuse against men and, indeed against women, is a serious problem for those who experience it. Male victims of domestic abuse report they fear they will not be believed if they report the abuse. They can feel ashamed to admit to being a victim as this challenges the traditional ideological view of men. Some male victims claim they cannot fight back or defend themselves in case they are accused of being the abuser. Fathers fear if they leave their abuser they will lose access to their children. Furthermore, many are concerned they may have nowhere to go should they leave their abusive situation as there is no domestic abuse refuge for men in Ireland.

No one should feel afraid in their home regardless of their gender. No one should be abused by an intimate partner and no one should feel they cannot talk to someone about it.

## What Help is Available?

Men have exactly the same rights as women to be safe in their own homes. All statutory services (such as the Gardaí, Courts, and social services) have a duty to provide services to all, whatever their gender. Men are protected by exactly the same laws as women - anyone who has assaulted another person, regardless of the gender of either, can be prosecuted.

Men who are living with domestic abuse can contact [Amen](#) which is a voluntary group which provides a confidential helpline, information and a support service for male victims of domestic abuse, their concerned family members or friends. You can contact them by calling (046 9023718) which is open from 9am to 5pm Monday – Friday or by emailing [info@amen.ie](mailto:info@amen.ie)

Men who have experienced sexual abuse including sexual abuse by an intimate partner can contact their local Rape Crisis Centre or the National Rape Crisis Helpline on 1800 778 888 (operated by [Dublin Rape Crisis Centre](#)) for support and information.

[One in Four](#) (01 6624070) also provides support to individuals who have, or are concerned about someone who has, experienced sexual violence or abuse. Rape Crisis Centres and One in Four also provide support and information to adults who have experienced sexual abuse in their childhood.



# Types of Domestic Abuse

## Physical

Physical violence/abuse is any intentional and unwanted contact with you or something close to your body. Examples of physical abuse are: direct assault on the body; hitting; slapping; biting; choking; shoving; punching; mutilation; burns; throwing of objects; use of weapons, roughly grabbing a phone, etc.

## Emotional

Examples of emotional or psychological abuse are humiliation; bullying; threatening to hurt children; exploitation; intimidation; psychological degradation; threatening of reporting of non-existent criminal acts; threatening removal of access to children; verbal aggression; undermining of self-esteem; name calling; continual "put downs" etc.

## Sexual

Sexual violence, as a form of domestic abuse, is any form of sexual coercion (physical or emotional) or sexual degradation against an individual in the family or domestic unit. Examples are incest; rape between spouses, cohabitants, partners or ex-partners; sexual activity without consent; unwanted touching; causing pain during sex without consent etc.

## Financial

Examples of financial or economic abuse include: economic blackmail; complete control of all monies and bank accounts; denial of access to necessary funds; preventing the victim from working etc.

## Social

Examples of social abuse include systematic isolation from family and friends; forbidding or physically preventing the victim from going out and meeting people etc. In homosexual relationships, threatening to 'out' a partner against their will.

## Digital

Digital or online abuse is the use of technologies such as texting and social networking to bully, harass, stalk or intimidate a partner. In most cases, this type of abuse is emotional and/or verbal and is perpetuated online. Examples include: sending negative, insulting or even threatening emails, Facebook messages, tweets; online "put downs" on status updates; sending unwanted and/or explicit pictures; stealing or insisting on being given online passwords; constantly checking of victim's mobile phones for pictures, texts and calls; unkind comments/tags on Instagram or Tumblr etc.



## Signs of Domestic Abuse

Before you get involved, ask yourself if it's safe and legal to intervene. If the situation is already violent or looks like its escalating quickly, don't directly intervene. Call the Gardaí on 999. The only effective bystander intervention is a nonviolent one. If you try to "rescue" a victim or fight off an abuser, you'll not only be endangering yourself, but the abuser might take out their anger on the victim later. The victim could end up more isolated and less likely to

### When you are concerned about someone you know

These are some warning signs that people who are concerned about someone they care about can look out for:

Someone experiencing abuse may seem:

- Anxious to please their partner
- Afraid of their partner, talking about their temper, possessiveness, or jealousy
- Restricted from seeing family and friends
- Limited in access to money or a car
- Depressed, anxious, or suicidal

Follow your instincts. If you've noticed these warning signs and expect that someone you know is being abused, then it is likely that they are.

### When you are concerned about a stranger

Unfortunately, bystanders to abuse between strangers have a limited amount of time to assess the situation and decide how to best intervene.

There are some warning signs that a situation might be abusive:

If the person suspected of being an abuser is:

- Acting excessively jealous of their partner
- Insulting or embarrassing their partner in public
- Yelling at or trying to intimidate their partner

Or, if the person suspected of being a victim is:

- Acting afraid of their partner
- Acting submissive
- Showing physical injuries, or wearing unusual clothing as if to hide an injury (ie, sunglasses indoors or long sleeves in summer).

If these signs are apparent, then the behaviour being witnessed could well be abuse



## Advice for bystanders/witnesses concerned about someone they know

Don't wait for them to approach you. Look for a private moment where you can express concern and let them know you're there to support them. A simple question like "are you ok?" could give you both an opportunity to talk.

### **Express concern**

Tell your friend that you've been concerned for them or that you're worried. This is a non-judgmental approach that might make them feel comfortable in opening up. If they deny that anything is wrong, don't push, but communicate that you'll be there for them if they ever want to talk.

### **Assure them that the violence is not their fault.**

This can be such an important thing for a victim of violence to hear. Some useful things to say might be, "No one deserves to be treated this way," "You are not to blame," or simply, "What's happening is not your fault."

### **Support, but don't give advice**

This can be so hard to do, especially if the victim is someone close to you. But remember that you cannot make someone leave a relationship if they are not ready to do so. **Be aware that leaving an abusive relationship is the most dangerous time for a victim. The victim is best placed to assess the danger to themselves.** Give them options and offer to help and support them along the way, but pressuring a victim to leave a relationship who does not want to may only isolate them further by making them feel like they can't confide in you. Remember that abusive behaviour is a pattern of getting power and control over someone else. Validating a victim's choices and encouraging them to make their own decisions about their life can help to break the cycle of power and control.

### **Give resources**

There are plenty of services in Ireland who can offer help and support to the person you are concerned about. Check out [www.whatwouldyoudo.ie](http://www.whatwouldyoudo.ie) for a list of services and advice on how to find the one most appropriate.



## Advice for people witnessing abuse between strangers

If you've decided that a situation requires an intervention and you are happy that it is safe to do so, try following one or more of the three D's.

### Distract

Creating a distraction is an indirect and non-confrontational way to intervene, and it can help keep a dangerous situation from escalating. You can try distracting either the person about to commit violence, or the potential victim. Either way, your goal is to prevent a situation from getting worse, or better yet, buy enough time to check in with the potential victim.

Examples: Ask for directions, the time, help looking for a lost item, or anything else that you think might keep them from leaving quickly. Better yet, if you can use a distraction that will get you a moment alone with the victim, to ask is there a problem.

### Delegate

Even if you don't know the victim and the abuser, someone else in the room might. Friends of the people involved might be in a better position to get involved, and they might have a better opportunity for a sustained intervention than you. You could say to them, "Look, I'm concerned about that person. Their partner seems really angry. Would you be able to check in on the situation now or later?"

Or, if you don't feel comfortable intervening but it doesn't seem like the situation calls for Garda involvement, look for someone else who might be in a better position to get involved. If you're at a bar, look for the bouncer or someone in a similar role and point out what's happening.

### Direct

In a direct approach you either approach the potential victim or potential abuser and intervene. The problem with directly approaching an abuser is that they may attack you and they might end up taking it out on their partner later. If you're going to have any direct contact with a possible abuser it's probably best to be subtler, like using body language to communicate disapproval and make your presence and concern known. You could do this just by watching what is happening and making it obvious that you're keeping an eye on the situation.

If you're going to try a direct approach, your best bet will probably be to approach the victim. You can simply say, "I'm concerned about what just happened. Is anything wrong?" Or, if you only have an instant and there's no opportunity for even a brief conversation, you could say, "No one deserves to be treated like that," or, "That wasn't your fault." Don't try to give advice or judge or blame the victim for what's just happened. Use the opportunity to say that you're concerned, that you want to help, and that it's not their fault.