

# We Lived to Tell

Migrant Women's Personal  
Experiences of Domestic Violence



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## Migrant Women's Personal Experiences of Domestic Violence



The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence  
An Oifig Náisiúnta um Fhoréigean Bailé, Gnéasach agus Inscnebhunaithe a Chosc

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This publication contains migrant women's personal experiences of domestic violence, and some of these women have been supported by AkiDwA. The booklet also provides information on how to access domestic violence support services in Ireland. The identities of the women featured in this booklet have been changed, and the stories are documented as they were told by the women. The two main aims for compiling this booklet are: (a) to raise awareness of domestic violence and challenge the culture of minimisation and denial of domestic violence among migrant communities, and (b) to empower and support survivors and those experiencing domestic violence. This booklet can also be used as a resource tool for service providers, the general public and educational institutions. The interviews for this publication were carried out by Nobuhle Ncube (advocacy and networking coordinator, AkiDwA).

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## Dedication

AkiDwA would like to dedicate this booklet to all women who have experienced domestic violence, and who still experience domestic violence, and still find the strength to move on with their lives. AkiDwA also wants to encourage women to come out and access support, regardless of the situations in which they find themselves. AkiDwA also sadly dedicates this booklet to the memory of migrant women who have passed away due to domestic violence. In particular, this dedication is to the memory of Rudo Mawere, who was murdered by her partner in January 2012.

## Acknowledgements

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*Disclaimer: The views in this document do not necessarily reflect views or policies of Cosc.*

**Booklet compiled by Nobuhle Ncube (advocacy and networking coordinator, AkiDwA)**

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# 1 Background and Context of AkiDwA's Work on Domestic Violence

AkiDwA is a migrant-led organisation of African and migrant women living in Ireland. The non-governmental organisation with charitable status was established in August 2001 by a group of seven African women, in order to address the needs of an expanding population of African and other migrant women in Ireland.

The organisation is a recognised authority on migrant women's issues and a representative body for all migrant women, irrespective of their national or ethnic backgrounds, culture, religious beliefs, or socio-economic or legal status. AkiDwA's advocacy approach is based on strengthening migrant women's voices by applying a gender and cultural perspective to policies and practices, and by promoting the equality of migrant women in Irish society.

AkiDwA's work on domestic violence started with the commencement of the organisation in 2001. Some of the founding members were experiencing domestic violence, and the organisation also received phone calls from women living in hostels who were experiencing domestic violence. AkiDwA's focus on domestic violence became a key area of its work.

The organisation has a track record in its work on gender-based violence (GBV), the two key areas being female genital mutilation (FGM) and domestic violence. AkiDwA's 2010 statistics on FGM shows that there are 3,170 women and girls who have undergone FGM living in Ireland. On 28 March 2012, after campaigning tirelessly for FGM legislation in Ireland, a bill was passed. The Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation Act 2012) was then signed into law on 2 April by Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland.

## 2. AkiDwA's Work on Domestic Violence

Since its establishment in 2001, AkiDwA has supported migrant women experiencing domestic violence, and it has been involved in research, policy-making and awareness-raising. In 2007-8, AkiDwA delivered awareness-raising workshops on domestic violence with migrant women in five counties, and it started offering one-to-one support to African women experiencing domestic violence. Approach referrals were also made to other domestic violence and immigration services. A baseline survey, *Domestic Violence amongst Migrant Communities in Ireland*, was conducted and published in March 2009 (available at [www.akidwa.ie](http://www.akidwa.ie)). This survey was conducted with two target groups: African women and service providers in Ireland. With regard to African women in Ireland, this survey was intended to ascertain a baseline of their understanding and perceptions of domestic violence. Through discussions with African women, AkiDwA came to realise that this objective was influenced by the realisation that some African women only recognised the physical part of violence, such as battering, as domestic violence. In awareness-raising training, AkiDwA saw in its small sample that verbal abuse and psychological/mental abuse were more or less tolerated and accepted, and not as readily recognised or acknowledged as forms of domestic abuse.

In April 2009, AkiDwA published its *Domestic Violence Toolkit: Identifying and Responding to the Needs of African and Other Migrant Women Experiencing Domestic Violence in Ireland* (available at [www.akidwa.ie](http://www.akidwa.ie)). This toolkit was developed to raise awareness and to help African and other migrant women understand domestic violence and its dynamics. The toolkit was also developed to share an African cultural perspective, as well as provide an insight into the specific needs and experiences of African women experiencing or affected by domestic violence. It illustrates the unique factors of domestic violence cases of African women living in Ireland, and highlights how better to facilitate their effective access to domestic violence support services.

In 2010, AkiDwA contributed to the Irish government's *National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2010-2014* and is represented on the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women, the Observatory Committee on Violence against Women, and the Public Awareness Subcommittee and has contributed to the Communication Paper on Approaches to Promoting and developing an Understanding of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence [1]. In 2011, AkiDwA sought partnership with the Immigrant Council of Ireland on the issue of access to independent status for migrants experiencing domestic violence in Ireland and who are on dependent-spouse status. This led to the formation of an NGO domestic violence forum. AkiDwA has also made submissions to the Justice Committee. Its awareness-raising approach now involves addressing domestic violence from a community perspective. This consists of liaising with men's groups and religious leaders in migrant communities, with the hope that by working together, domestic violence within migrant communities will be effectively addressed.

## 3. Migrant Women and Domestic Violence in Ireland

### 3.1 The Prevalence of Domestic Violence

In 2011, Women's Aid recorded 12,612 incidents of domestic violence. These were disclosed to the Women's Aid national Freephone helpline. These included 8,399 incidents of emotional abuse, 2,337 incidents of physical abuse, and 1,399 incidents of financial abuse. In addition, 477 incidents of sexual abuse were disclosed to helpline support workers, including 184 rapes [2].

In 2011, 41% of first time cases handled by Women's Aid one-to-one support services were migrant women (ibid.). Some 37% of women accessing refuge identified themselves as Travellers, 6% as black, and 2% as Asian. It is worth emphasising the fact that these statistics indicate that minority women face additional barriers to obtaining long-term safety and lack other possible options beyond emergency accommodation [3]. Thus it is vital not to draw conclusions about the severity of domestic violence amongst particular minority ethnic communities, given that some appear 'over-represented' in refuge provision. Non-indigenous minority ethnic women only comprise approximately 5% of Ireland's population, but represented 13% of those seeking services from gender-based violence organisations. Traveller women make up 0.5% of the population, but represent 15% of service users [4].

Since 1996, 186 women have been murdered in the Republic of Ireland. Of them, 115 (62%) were killed in their own homes. In relation to resolved cases, 71 women (53%) were murdered by a partner or ex-partner, and 47 of these women were killed by someone they knew (e.g. brother, son, neighbour). Thus, a total of 118 women (88%) were killed by someone known to them. In all of the resolved cases, 99% of perpetrators were male and 1% were female [5]. It is estimated that 22 of these women were from migrant backgrounds.

### 3.2 Victims of Domestic Violence: Recent Immigration Guidelines

The following is a summary of guidelines that were published by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS). For more information, please visit the INIS website ([www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie)). These guidelines contain information on dealing with cases where a person who is the victim of domestic violence wishes to obtain immigration status independent of his/her relationship with the perpetrator. The publication of these guidelines provides information on a formal procedure that is in place and available to migrant victims of domestic violence.

### 3.3 Making an Application for Independent Status as a Victim of Domestic Violence

- Applications must be made from inside the state (Ireland), and the applicant should have some form of current immigration status, e.g. as the dependant of an Irish national or a foreign national who has immigration permission to live in Ireland. If the applicant's immigration status has lapsed, an application can still be made, but it will have to be clearly explained in the application as to the circumstances in which the permission was not renewed.
- Applications should be made in writing to: General Immigration Division, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2. There is no application fee. In the event of the application being successful, the normal registration fee will be applied.
- This application can be made through a solicitor or directly by the person him/herself. It should set out the details of the domestic violence suffered and make a request for independent immigration status. Any relevant family circumstances, especially if there are children involved, should be disclosed, including information on whether or not the applicant (or the perpetrator) has left the family home.

#### 3.3.1 Evidence to Support an Application

For an application to be fully considered, the INIS requires the applicant to supply as much information as possible in support of his/her claim as a victim of domestic violence. The following are examples of documents that would be helpful in establishing a claim. These include:

- o protection order, safety order or barring order from the court;
- o medical reports indicating injuries consistent with domestic violence (details of doctor and dates of consultation should be supplied);
- o a Garda report of incidents of domestic violence;
- o a letter of support from a domestic violence support organisation; and/or
- o any other evidence indicating that the applicant is the victim of domestic violence.

### 3.3.2 Immigration Categories for Victims of Domestic Violence

In general, if granted, the immigration status of the successful applicant would be at the same level as that which was previously held as a dependant (normally Stamp 3). The main difference is that this status is no longer dependent on the spouse/partner. The spouse/partner will have no say in whether or not the applicant is permitted to stay in Ireland. Where it is necessary for the victim to work to support him/herself or family members who are lawfully residing in the state, consideration will be given to granting permission to work.

### 3.3.3 What if I am unlawfully present in the state?

This policy is aimed at providing a lawfully resident victim of domestic violence with immigration status independent of the perpetrator. The arrangements previously outlined do not apply where the victim is unlawfully present.

However, domestic violence should always be reported to An Garda Síochána, who will investigate the complaints. Evidence of domestic violence can be presented for consideration in any immigration determination, including a leave-to-remain application made on foot of a notification to deport.

A person who is being subjected to domestic violence may apply for a barring/protection under the Domestic Violence Act 1996.

All decisions are at the Minister's discretion.

## 4. Personal Stories of Migrant Women's Experiences of Domestic Violence

The following stories are the personal narratives of migrant women who have experienced multiple forms of domestic violence while living in Ireland. Some of these experiences began when the women were still living in their countries of origin. Their identities have been changed herein, for their privacy and protection, and their stories told in their own words, or as closely as possible to their own words.

### Linda's Story

My name is Linda. I am the mother of three beautiful kids. I was the wife of a religious leader. I am now divorced. I started experiencing emotional abuse 13 years ago, and it started back at home. When I got married, I tried to be a good wife. I was manipulated by religion. My understanding of my religion was that being a good wife meant that I had to be submissive to my husband. I became submissive, hoping that my situation would change for the better. I did everything to please my husband, and I made more mistakes. I was scared of losing my home. What would people say? I was afraid of being marginalised in the religious setting.

The abuse I experienced made me believe that it was my entire fault. I lost self-esteem. I couldn't believe that I could make any useful decisions on my own. I was consulting others on my views. I didn't think I could do anything right. I was at the hands of my partner. The difficulty I had as the wife of a leader in a religious setting was that others came to me for support and advice, and I couldn't express my fears and concerns to anyone. I became detached from my feelings and family. My family thought I was crazy in love, and they thought I was selling them out. I became separated from my friends and family. He didn't want me to talk to anybody. He didn't want me to tell others what was going on, or else the relationship would end. He was afraid of me being with people.

I remember a particular day when his sister had visited us from home, and we were chatting and laughing. He heard us laughing, and then called me to the bedroom and said, 'Each time I give you a little chance to be happy, you go and get out of hand.' That was the first time I realised that he thought he had the key to my happiness. Then he was right. Prior to that, I thought my problems, the abuse, were due to negative spiritual forces. I found everybody to blame rather than address the truth. He also blamed me, and told me that I made him do things to me. I didn't go out to seek help. I was always praying that God would change the situation until I was diagnosed with breast cancer.

I remember when I was pregnant and went into labour. His sister called the ambulance, and they said only one person was permitted to accompany me to the hospital. My husband came, and when we got to the labour room, he sat in a corner, far away from me. I had bleeding complications, and he was detached from me and not supportive. When I had delivered the baby, his sister came and said to him, 'Look at this beautiful boy – you can't even hug him.' From that day, my husband only came once to give me food, and when I asked him why he didn't visit on the other days, he told me that he was busy working. I was emotionally distressed. I struggled to breastfeed. I even tried to massage my breasts so as to encourage the flow of milk. That was when I noticed a lump in my breast. I was also reading the leaflets from the hospital, and this alerted me to contact the breast clinic. I called the breast clinic and was told to call my GP, and I got an antibiotic. During this time, my husband left me alone with the kids to work in Dublin. Then we used to live outside Dublin, about three hours away.

I struggled to cope, and I asked my husband if he thought what he was doing was right, leaving me alone with the kids and a small baby in such a remote place. He responded by telling me that I brought it upon myself. After a week, I noticed that my breasts were big. I contacted the breast clinic, and was told to come back for more antibiotics. I had a fever, not feeling well, and had to drive myself to the hospital with the kids. When I got there, they were shocked at the state of my breasts. I was admitted and operated on, and a tumour was discovered. A friend came to visit me, and she saw the scar. She was shocked. It was deep. She called my husband and told him. He told her that he didn't want to see it because he wanted to eat. I was hurt by this. Then the hospital told me that I had cancer. I was alone when this happened. At that time I coped because I thought that once they removed my breast, I'd be OK, but then an ambulance was called and my child was taken away. Then I knew I had a problem. My husband would not come to visit me and gave excuses, saying that he was tired or working. If he did come, he would just accuse me.

At that time, I didn't take any steps to end the relationship or the violence. First of all, I didn't consider it abuse because I thought this was spiritual and he was spiritually manipulated. When I was discharged from hospital and went back home, he quarrelled with my sister and walked away. I ended up back in hospital and had lost a lot of blood. My life was at stake. He kept on fighting with my sister. I cried in the hospital, and a social worker was called to assist me, and the only thing I said was that I had no home to go to, and we were transferred to live in Dublin. I still hoped things would work out. I realise, at that stage, that I had lost a lot of self-esteem. I was ashamed of losing my home. I was ashamed about how the world would look at me. I had so many confused emotions and wanted to work things out with my husband. Luckily, he walked out, and at that point I wondered

how many people were in my position and would not talk about their problems. Part of my cancer was that I bottled up emotions. In being submissive, a lot of women give up their rights and remain in abusive relationships.

I would advise women to seek help. Most times, women don't seek help until it's a matter of life and death. Most times, abusers make you feel that you are the one to blame. You stop functioning as a person and change to suit other people. I now believe that the truth about people who want to change others have low self-esteem, and also, women should not blame themselves. It is difficult until that person comes to terms with the abuse. We start by trying to avoid trouble and keep peace in the house. People who are abusive say they do it in the name of love – 'I beat you because I love you.' I have discovered that these people who abuse others do not love themselves, first of all. The abuse will go on as long as you take it. For me, he walked out and made it easy for me, as I was not capable of walking out. I now believe it takes two to tango. It takes a perpetrator and a victim for abuse to take place. I advise women not to give up their rights because the day you do it, it will be difficult to take back. A marriage is about two people, not one. A family is also the same. This way, every individual should have rights. Some men start taking rights away from women by saying things like, 'You don't appreciate me. I will look for those who appreciate me.' Most African women will stay because they believe the Bible says they should be submissive, but the Bible does not say they should be abused.

My husband came back to me, and despite people's advice, I took him back, and the course I was doing empowered me. He came back a changed man. He was cooking. I was on the defence. I was happy about this. I got myself back. I had my rights and gained self-esteem. My husband was calm. But after a while, I realised that I had to let him go before I started abusing him. People don't understand why I let him go. I never thought I would have gone on with my life before he left. I advise women not to give up their rights. I also advise men not to ask their wives to give them their rights.

I went to register in college and did a course because one of the challenges I had when I was experiencing abuse was that I lacked confidence and self-esteem. I practically experienced disrespect and abuse from other people, and I would go back and apologise. I also found out that I was trying to please other people so as to be accepted. People took advantage of my help and manipulated me. I learned to assess myself and read stories about people who were abused. I thought of going to school. I was afraid I couldn't remember things well. I stayed in the library until lectures started. I did a course in human development, and this course really helped me, even to speak out about my situation. My course director helped to identify solutions and possibilities. The course helped me to identify who I really was.

I also started attending a different religious congregation. People I had known as friends had abandoned me. I was in a new environment, new life, and no judgement. In the former congregation, I was always judged. I became overwhelmed working and going to college. I was under pressure and went back to hospital for a major surgery. I also went to court and met my husband for divorce. I was afraid to meet him. He came with apologies, and I thought he wanted something. On the contrary, I think God brought him back so I could get myself back and have closure. I am happy, divorced and living with my kids now.

## Nina's Story

I am a mother of two, and a nurse by profession. For more than seven years, I was beaten, pushed, kicked and emotionally abused. Some of the things he used to say to me left me feeling worthless, confused and not knowing who I was any more. The physical abuse started when we were both home, before coming to live in Ireland. We were just dating then. I remember that particular day when I had my first experience of domestic violence. We had spent a day with his friends and decided to spend the night at his friend's place. When we got there, he closed the door and started beating me up. I screamed, shouted. The beating was very bad. I asked him, why he was doing this? He said that I had insulted him in front of his friends. He then broke down and apologised. Reflecting on this now, that should have been the first sign for me. We got married, and several times he beat me up in front of his parents. He left me to live with his parents. I felt isolated and stuck living with them. I once attempted suicide.

I left my home country and came to live in Ireland, and he joined me and the kids. The abuse continued. I remember a time when he beat me up so badly that I ran out of the house naked. I knocked on people's doors and nobody responded. He broke my arm, and my daughter witnessed this and she cried. On another occasion he pushed me again, and I landed on the bed and it broke into two. He told me that if I called the Guards, they would not help me or come. He went out and I called the Guards, and they did come. I asked them to leave their card so he would know that they came. On another occasion, when I was pregnant, he pushed me from the top of the stairs. I was spotting and had to go to the hospital. I got help from the hospital and was referred to a women's refuge.

I had a positive experience being in a women's refuge, but long term, I would suggest that outreach should continue, even though the woman is no longer in the women's refuge. Things such as meeting for coffee and also financial support, maybe vouchers from St. Vincent de Paul, could be helpful for a woman parenting alone. I believe that the journey begins when you leave a man. Women should let men be men, and ask them to provide financial support for the upkeep of the children. Women should not be in a position where they have to suffer alone financially.

The straw that broke the camel's back was when he smashed my head on the oven door in the kitchen. The glass smashed into pieces. The floor was white in colour, and my blood was all over it. I thought I was going to die. At that moment I prayed and asked God to let me live for the sake of my children. The kids were watching when all this was happening. I had to look for accommodation and found it challenging at times. This experience alone can discourage some women from moving on. What motivates me in such challenges is being able to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

He has been out of the country for about four years now, and sometimes still makes phone calls, with demands. The verbal abuse I suffered made me feel deflected. I was on antidepressants and tried to commit suicide. He told me countless times that I could not live without him. This still has an effect on my relationships with people. Based on my experience, I feel that abused women sometimes cannot rationally think for themselves, and need someone who will tell them to get out of such relationships. At that point in time, I had a lot of things going through my mind. When I was living in a women's refuge, staff members kept on telling me that I was a strong woman several times, but then I actually needed someone to give me a push or encourage me to leave my marriage. Women need emotional support and empowerment. I want to empower other women. I am not ashamed to be a voice for other women. I also encourage other women to share their experiences. Women should get out, take a step and seek help. It is not the end of the world.

What empowered me is that deep down inside I knew that I did not deserve this treatment. I had a good background, good education. My children also motivated me to move on. I went back to college, upgraded my qualification and went back to work. I wanted to achieve and prove a point: that I could make it on my own, and I did. I had to find an outlet for my pain. For four years I worked and went to college. I am advising women to be kind to yourself – you have nothing to be ashamed of. One thing women need to realise is that even if a man tells you that you cannot make it on your own, the truth is, you can, and it's important to stop seeing yourself as a victim. See yourself as a survivor. You need to move on from one stage to another.

I would not want my son to beat up his wife. My daughter will not go through what I went through. I should not have married my husband. The warning sign was there, but I did not see it.

## Melissa's Story

My story is something that I sometimes think of as a living hell, but I thank God for giving me the strength to move on. For me, the violence started when we were just girlfriend and boyfriend. He used to come to my country to buy things like spare parts for cars and sell them. He used to bring me nice presents from his home country, and I was very happy to wear new clothes. Most of my friends envied me. Things got bad at home. War broke out. My peaceful home became a dangerous place for women, especially young women. The war became bad, and we started hearing stories of women being raped and sometimes beaten. Most of my friends started leaving for bigger cities, and I dreamt of leaving as well. My mum was not well at that time, and it was very difficult to go to hospital, no medication. It was really bad. My boyfriend came and took me to his country. I was happy to be away and felt safe.

Everything was nice. I was happy and felt safe, but I missed home a lot. We got married and had our first baby. That was when he became short-tempered and would disappear for days. If I asked him where he was, he would tell me that I knew he was a businessman and didn't have to explain where he was going all the time. I became lonely with a small baby and in a country that was new to me. I also had a problem speaking another language. We were living on the outskirts of the city and I had very few friends. I used to braid people's hair and made a bit of money. I became pregnant with our second baby, and he started beating and kicking me, sometimes for no reason. He would sometimes shout at me and call me all sorts of names, and he started telling me that he would tell the immigration police to deport me. I was afraid of this. Deep down, I wanted to go back home, but going back was worse than what I was living with. I was left alone most times with the kids, and I started saving money I got from hairdressing.

The beating became worse, sometimes in front of the children. I called his family several times, and my mother-in-law would tell me that she would talk to him, but I had to stop annoying him and obey my husband. I remember one day he came home drunk and woke me up in the middle of the night to cook food for him. He said he didn't like what I had prepared for him. I was very tired that day, and had just gone to bed with the kids. He came to the kitchen, shouting that I was taking too long to bring his food. I tried to explain what I was doing, and the next thing, I felt hot water burning my back. He unplugged the water I was boiling and poured it on my back. I screamed and ran out of the house, barefooted with nothing but a nightdress. I remember crying and walking the streets, which were not safe for a woman to walk at night. I could not cry any more. I was worried about my children, and I asked God to help me. I had nowhere to go. I was afraid of going to the police station. The police would not help me. Instead they would call my husband to come and collect me. I sat outside the door of our house until morning.

I thought of running away and going back to my home country. I begged him to take me to the clinic for my back, but he just threw money at me and told me to go there myself. I went and could not tell the truth. I didn't know what to say. I was confused and afraid. My back was badly burnt. It was then that I made up my mind to run back home, back to the war. After a few days, my husband had disappeared, as usual, for a few days. I took my clothes and my children and ran away, back home.

The war was still bad, and worse in small towns. I stayed in the city and joined a group of people that were leaving home for Europe. I paid my way and was glad to be in Ireland. I felt safe from the war and violence. After a year, my husband contacted me through my relatives, and the first phone call I got from him, I felt like I had diarrhoea. I felt hot and started panicking. I was afraid and could not talk. He said he wanted to see the children, and that he was sorry and had changed. I could not think straight. He eventually came, and was OK for a few months. I had my residency and started going to college. I wanted to speak better English and also do a course. This was a chance to do all things and start my life. My husband started getting angry whenever I went out, even to college. He started saying that I did not get permission from him to go to college, I now behave like a white woman. I had to ask him before I went out, and I should not ask him to look after the children. He started beating me again. He blamed me for being in Ireland, and he did not have his residency because of me. I stopped going to college because there was no support for the children, and most times I would be late because of my husband. He started beating me in front of the children, and I got a letter from my daughter's school asking me to come.

The principal told me that my daughter was not happy and had changed, and also that she had said that Mum and Daddy are always fighting. She then asked me if there was domestic violence within the family. I could not say anything, but just cried. She then asked me if I wanted help, and gave me the number of a support service. I called the helpline and decided to move to a women's refuge. My husband called my relatives and told them lies: I didn't want to listen to him and had left our home. I was under pressure to go back, but the staff at the refuge advised me to go for counselling and also linked me with a women's organisation. I didn't go back to my husband. I was afraid every time I got a phone call from him. I went and got a barring order. It was not easy. Sometimes I got confused, but I had support. That helped me to get a house, and I went back to college. All I wanted to do was to get a second chance in life and look after my children. I wanted my children to have a happy childhood. I didn't have any because of war and poverty. I am happy now, and have almost completed my first diploma, but I also have times when I think about what has happened to me and I cry. I also have a part-time job and want to do more things in life.

## 4.1 Living with Domestic Violence

These personal stories reflect the reality of the day-to-day lives of women living with domestic violence. Women in domestic violence situations are manipulated, and often blame for the violence is placed on the victim. Women should note that the blame is not on them, but on the person who abuses the other. There is no excuse for domestic violence, and it is violent behaviour with a purpose: to intimidate and control. Experiences of domestic violence vary, from physical and financial abuse to isolating the woman from friends and family, which is a tactic that is mostly used to stop the woman from getting support or being empowered, and it also often aggravates fear of the abuser. The emotional/psychological abuse often lasts longer, even though the woman is no longer in an abusive relationship. Thus it is important for women to access support services when they are experiencing domestic violence. (see chapter 5 for more information)

## 4.2 What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is a serious problem that occurs in every society, regardless of cultural/religious backgrounds or socio-economic groups. Domestic violence has devastating physical, emotional, financial and social effects on victims. The majority of victims of domestic violence are women, children and the family unit. The United Nations defines violence against women as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life' [6]. In providing support and information, it is important to also note or take into account women's own understanding of domestic violence.

### 4.3 Warning Signs

The following list is comprised of issues that may be experienced in a domestic violence situation. You do not need to experience all or many of them for your relationship to be abusive [7].

- You are afraid of your partner.
- You are constantly 'walking on eggshells' because of his mood swings.
- You spend your time working out what kind of mood he is in and the focus is always on his needs.
- He loses his temper easily and over minor things.
- He has hit you or almost hit you and/or your children.
- Your partner has been abusive in a previous relationship.
- He criticises your family and friends and/or makes it difficult for you to see them or talk to them on your own.
- He calls you names and threatens you and/or your children.
- He is jealous and accuses you of flirting and having affairs.
- He regularly criticises or undermines you in front of other people – including about the way you look, dress, and/or your abilities as a mother.
- Your needs are not considered important or are ignored, and he makes the decisions in the relationship.
- You find it hard to get time on your own. When you do spend time away from him, he demands to know where you were and who you were with.
- He controls your access to basic essentials such as the car, the family finances, food, the telephone and Internet.
- He has forced you to do something that you really did not want to do.
- He has forced you to have sex with him or with other people. He has made you participate in sexual activities that you were uncomfortable with.
- He has threatened to have you deported because of your immigration status.
- He tries to control aspects of your life such as whether you work, and where; who you see and when; what you can spend; what you can wear; what you watch or listen to on the radio or television.
- He demands to know the passwords to your email account and social-networking pages.

## 5. Accessing Support Services

### 5.1 What do I do if I am experiencing domestic violence?

Ireland provides a wide range of support services for people experiencing or affected by domestic violence, and most of these services provide free and confidential support to women and children. The main support services in Ireland include Women's Aid, Dolphin House Family Law Court Support and Referral Service, women's refuges, frontline services and Freephone helplines.

### 5.2 Helplines

A helpline is a phone number that you can call to find out information to get help. Helplines are staffed by trained and experienced people who can support you. Women's Aid has a national Freephone helpline (1800 341 900), which operates from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week (except on Christmas). You can also contact SAFE Ireland ([www.safeireland.ie](http://www.safeireland.ie)). Its members have lo-call or Freephone numbers, some of which are available 24 hours a day. If English is not your first language: the Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline can access an interpreter in your language.

### 5.3 Dolphin House Family Law Court Support and Referral Service

The Dolphin House Family Court Support and Referral Service provides a free and confidential drop-in service for women who are experiencing abuse in a relationship, including emotional, physical, sexual or financial abuse. This service is based on the fourth floor of Dolphin House Family Law Court between 9.30 a.m. and 1.30 p.m., Monday to Friday. You can drop in or ask the court clerk or reception for more information.

### 5.4 What is a women's refuge?

A refuge is a safe place where a woman who is experiencing domestic violence can go to get support and live safely while a decision is being made on what to do next. Refuges are generally open 24 hours a day and throughout the year. There are 21 refuges across Ireland. Any woman who needs to escape from domestic violence or abuse can go into a refuge at any time. It does not matter whether or not you are married to or living with your abuser, or whether or not you have children.

## 5.5 How can I contact a women's refuge?

Women's Aid has a national 24-hour Freephone helpline (1800 341 900). SAFE Ireland can be contacted on 090 647 9078 or via [www.safeireland.ie](http://www.safeireland.ie). AkiDWA can be contacted on 01 834 9851 or via [info@akidwa.ie](mailto:info@akidwa.ie).

## 5.6 What can I take with me to the refuge?

The following is a suggested list of items that a woman may need to take, and it is also advisable to keep these items ready in a safe place, in case of leaving the house in an emergency or in a hurry.

- Identification, e.g. driver's licence, Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) card, passport, work permit, etc.
- Birth certificates for you and your children
- Medical records and cards, GP contacts, and school contacts for children
- Money, bank books, chequebooks, and credit and debit cards
- Keys (for your house, car and workplace)
- Prescribed medications
- Social welfare books, social services cards, Child Benefit books
- Clothing and toiletries for you and your children
- Your children's favourite toys

## 5.7 How can I apply for domestic violence protection?

In Ireland, the law provides protection for those living in violent situations in the home. Protection can be offered through barring, safety and protection orders. You can apply through your local district court office.

If you live in the Dublin area, you must go to the Dublin District Family Law Office. Alternatively, you can go to the Dublin District Court Office in Swords if it is nearer to you. The following process applies.

- The district court clerk will help you to fill out the correct form. You do not need a solicitor to make an initial application, but it is recommended that you have legal representation for a full court hearing. Legal advice and assistance may be provided by the legal aid board and domestic violence cases are treated as a priority.
- If you are applying for a barring order or a safety order, the court clerk will arrange a court date for a court hearing.

- You will be given your summons for the court hearing at the time of your application. A summons will be sent to the respondent (e.g. partner or husband or adult child) by ordinary post. The respondent is the person from whom you need to be protected or want barred from your home.
- You can also get a protection order or an interim barring order while you are waiting to go to court to get your barring order or safety order. The district court judge will hear your case on the day that you make your application for a barring order or safety order. The court may award a protection or interim barring order while you are waiting for the full hearing.
- If you do not want a protection order or an interim barring order immediately, you can seek one at any time before your case is heard for a barring or safety order.
- When you get your barring order, safety order, protection order or interim barring order, it is important that you show it to the Gardaí in your local Garda station. **Do not give them your order (you can allow them to take a photocopy).**
- A copy of your order will be sent to the superintendent of your local Garda station by registered post the following day.

Once the respondent is notified of the order, it immediately takes effect. This can be done verbally, together with the production of a copy of the order. If the respondent is in court when the order is made, s/he is considered to have been notified. A copy of the order will be sent to the respondent by ordinary post. In some cases, the judge may direct the Gardaí 'to serve' the order on the respondent. This means that the Gardaí will hand the order directly to the respondent [8].

# 6.

## General Useful Contacts: Who can I call for help or information?

AkiDwA: 01 834 9852, [info@akidwa.ie](mailto:info@akidwa.ie), [www.akidwa.ie](http://www.akidwa.ie)

COSC: The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence: 01 476 8680, [cosc@justice.ie](mailto:cosc@justice.ie), [www.cosc.ie](http://www.cosc.ie)

Courts Service: 01 888 6000, [www.courts.ie](http://www.courts.ie)

Citizens Information Centres: 1890 777 121, [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie)

National Sexual Violence Helpline (for men and women):  
1800 77 88 88

National Domestic Violence Helpline (for women): 1800 341 900 or via  
[www.womensaid.ie](http://www.womensaid.ie)

SAFE Ireland: 090 647 9078, [office@safeireland.ie](mailto:office@safeireland.ie), [www.safeireland.ie](http://www.safeireland.ie)

# 7.

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