

Domestic Abuse¹: A Public Health Epidemic

10 Point Plan for Programme for Government

8 May 2020

Sonas who we are...

We are the largest frontline service provider to women and child victims of domestic abuse in the greater Dublin region.

Sonas works directly with women *and* children; with dedicated teams providing support to both and an organisational infrastructure to support this work. We provide a comprehensive range of services to victims of abuse including Refuge, Safe Homes, Supported Housing Programmes, Outreach and Visiting Support, support around the legal process and Court Accompaniment, information and advice helpline.

We bring the lived reality of supporting victims on the frontline to policy:

- Sonas is a member of the monitoring committee for the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence
- Sonas is a member of the steering group of the Study of Familicide and Domestic Homicide Review

Domestic Abuse²: A Public Health Epidemic

10 Point Plan for Programme for Government

1. **Recognise domestic violence as a key public health problem with the associated personal, social, legal and economic costs. Allocate appropriate funding for intervention and prevention as a response to overall costs.**

The costs of domestic violence to the Irish economy are reckoned to be €2.2billion³. We spend less than 1% of costs on responding and preventing domestic abuse (approximately €20m/ Tusla domestic violence commissioned services budget.)

¹ Domestic Violence in Ireland: an overview of national strategic policy and relevant international literature on prevention and intervention initiatives in service provision Dr. Noreen Kearns, Liam Coen & Dr. John Cavanaugh Child and Family Research Centre Department of Political Science and Sociology National University of Ireland, Galway; 2008

² Domestic Violence in Ireland: an overview of national strategic policy and relevant international literature on prevention and intervention initiatives in service provision Dr. Noreen Kearns, Liam Coen & Dr. John Cavanaugh Child and Family Research Centre Department of Political Science and Sociology National University of Ireland, Galway; 2008

³ <https://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/domestic-violence-costs-the-country-22bn-63873.html>

1. The costs of domestic violence to the Irish economy are reckoned to be €2.2billion⁴. We spend less than 1% of costs on responding and preventing domestic abuse (approximately €20m/ Tusla domestic violence commissioned services budget.)
2. Resource more emergency accommodation/ refuge spaces to comply with Istanbul Convention; there are currently 20 refuges in Ireland spread across 17 counties. It is estimated that Ireland is short 300 family units to meet the state's obligations under the Istanbul Convention

In the Greater Dublin region, there is currently no refuge:

- in the fastest growing area of the region ie North Dublin and has been identified as an area requiring refuge
 - in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown which has the combined city populations of Cork and Limerick (Sonas co-ordinated a feasibility study, 2011)
3. Carry out impact assessment of National Housing Policy and associated guidelines on supporting victims of domestic abuse ⁵ in recognition of risks to safety and protection of victims
 4. Provide senior government oversight support for comprehensive domestic violence framework prioritising safety of victims and prevention and reduction of domestic violence in the population; prioritise resources accordingly. The framework should include: common risk assessment framework, inter-agency data sharing; facility for shared case management. Specifically in relation to domestic homicides/ familicides, establish domestic homicide reviews
 5. Prioritise development of new family law court in Hammond Lane
 6. Develop appropriately resourced (staff and funding) contact centre for children
 7. Ensure judiciary, court officials and legal representatives are suitably trained in awareness of domestic violence issues
 8. Ensure third national strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence puts victims at the centre of the strategy and adopts outcomes focus with outputs in support of goals; similarly, new National Strategy for Women and Girls
 9. Gender-proof all national policies likely to impact on the welfare and safety of victims of domestic abuse; cascade resulting policies including for relevant agencies for same

⁴ <https://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/domestic-violence-costs-the-country-22bn-63873.html>

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https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/guidance_for_housing_authorities_in_relation_to_assisting_victims_of_domestic_violence.pdf

Gap Analysis of Responses to Victims of Domestic Abuse⁶: A Public Health Epidemic

The following gap analysis identifies the gaps in current provision of responses to victims of domestic abuse.

1. Approach Gap: Under-recognition of Domestic Violence as a Public Health Problem

“Domestic violence is a human rights issue. Morbidity and mortality data indicate that domestic violence is an extremely serious public health problem in contemporary society, and the urgency of addressing this problem cannot be overemphasised.”⁷

Prevalence

In a 2014 study entitled 'Violence against Women: An EU-wide survey' by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), it was reported that:

- **1 in 7/ 14% of women in Ireland have experienced physical violence by a partner since age 15.**
- **1 in 16/ 6% of Irish women have experienced sexual violence by a current or former partner**
- **1 in 3/ 31% of women have experienced psychological violence by a partner**
- **1 in 8/ 12% of Irish respondents in the FRA study had experienced stalking (including cyber stalking)**

How this impacts...

- Lack of “joined-up” statutory response to “public health problem” of domestic abuse: health, housing, civil and criminal justice, social protection, immigration, economic
- Lack of “joined-up” analysis leads to under-estimation of domestic violence costs to the state
- Lack of systemic agility in anticipation and response to victims’ needs

Recommendation:

- **Recognise domestic violence as a key public health problem with the associated personal, social, legal and economic costs. Allocate appropriate funding for intervention and prevention as a response to overall costs. In relation to the latter:**

“Adding a financial dimension increases the range of ways in which policy interventions can be articulated, measured and evaluated and may assist in addressing spending priorities. This is complementary to the policy framework based on need and justice.”⁸

⁶ Domestic Violence in Ireland: an overview of national strategic policy and relevant international literature on prevention and intervention initiatives in service provision Dr. Noreen Kearns, Liam Coen & Dr. John Cavanaugh Child and Family Research Centre Department of Political Science and Sociology National University of Ireland, Galway; 2008

⁷ Ibid, p.67

⁸ Sylvia Walby, The Costs of Domestic Violence, February 2004 as cited in

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556931/IPOL_STU\(2016\)556931_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556931/IPOL_STU(2016)556931_EN.pdf)

2. Approach Gap: Under-recognition of Domestic Violence as a Gendered Phenomenon and its impacts

Gender as an influencing factor tends to have relatively low recognition in Irish policy and decision-making⁹ in key areas which impact on women's safety, for example, national homeless policy. Domestic violence is gendered. The majority of adult victims of domestic abuse are women; the majority of non-abusing parents in a child welfare and protection context are women; the majority of fatalities from domestic/ familial homicide are women. The majority of perpetrators of domestic abuse are male even where the victim is also male (see work of Sylvia Walby).

The state's resources are not allocated in proportionate response to the risk, harm and fatality levels of the crimes experienced primarily by women and children. The recent comments by

Loss of Life

- 225 women have died violently between 1996-2018. 176 cases (78%) have been resolved. 9 cases (4%) are awaiting trial and 40 cases (18%) remain unsolved.
- 16 children have died alongside their mothers.
- 137 women have been killed in their own homes (61%).
- Average of 10 women per year.
- 1 in every 2 femicide victims is killed by a current or former male intimate partner (56% of resolved cases).
- Women of any age can be victims of Femicide. However, women under the age of 35 make up 52% of cases in Ireland.
- In almost all murder-suicide cases (21 out of 22) the killer was the woman's partner.
- In the 20 cases where a woman has been killed by a male relative, 16 were killed by their sons (80%).¹⁰

How this impacts...

- Women victims of domestic abuse are at increased risk of fatality ie being killed
- Women victims of domestic abuse are at increased risk of serious harm ie experiencing serious or life threatening injuries requiring emergency care, hospital admission stay including intensive care
- Women victims of domestic abuse are at increased risk of sexual assault and may require services of sexual assault and treatment unit (SATU)

Recommendations

- **Provide senior government oversight support for comprehensive domestic violence framework prioritising safety of victims and prevention and reduction of domestic violence in the population; prioritise resources accordingly. The framework should include: common risk assessment framework, inter-agency data sharing; facility for shared case management. Specifically in relation to domestic homicides/ familicides, establish domestic homicide reviews**

⁹ https://merriionstreet.ie/MerriionStreet/en/ImageLibrary/20170503_National_Strategy_for_Women.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.womensaid.ie/assets/files/pdf/womens_aid_femicide_watch_2018_republic_of_ireland_embargoed_2311_18.pdf

- **Ensure third national strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence puts victims at the centre of the strategy and adopts outcomes focus with outputs in support of goals; similarly, new National Strategy for Women and Girls**
- **Gender-proof national policies likely to impact on the welfare and safety of victims of domestic abuse; cascade resulting policies including for relevant agencies for same**

Gap 3 Under Provision of Housing and Safe Accommodation for Victims of Domestic Abuse

Women and children experiencing domestic abuse face stark options including the very real risk of homelessness; short or long term; “official” or hidden. Domestic violence, sexual violence and other forms of gender based violence are drivers albeit “under-recognised” of women, children and young people becoming homeless. There is a scarcity in Ireland of affordable, available accommodation in both the social housing and private rental sectors. This scarcity is putting women and children experiencing domestic abuse at further risk of abuse.

Some facts...

- Ireland has among the highest rate of female homelessness in Europe – making up almost half (47%) of homeless in Dublin
- 2 out of 3 homeless families are headed by lone parents; the majority are female, young and under 25
- If Ireland is to meet its commitments under the Istanbul Convention re: accommodation based supports for victims of domestic abuse it will need an *additional* approximate 300 family units

“The research evidence presented in Women’s Homelessness in Europe draws strong attention to the role of domestic and other forms of gender-based violence in women’s homelessness. Intimate (male) partner violence is the reason why many women are forced to leave their homes. The relationship between domestic violence and women’s homelessness has other complex dimensions and may result in (some) women remaining in abusive home situations because they do not have the economic resources to leave. These women essentially find themselves choosing between domestic violence and homelessness.”¹¹

(*Women’s Homelessness in Europe* co-edited by Dr Paula Mayock, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin and Joanne Bretherton, Centre for Housing Policy, University of York, 2016)

How this impacts...

- Women are often at most risk of fatal assault in a violent relationship in the 6 month period after they leave; homelessness is a risk factor in domestic abuse therefore, safe short-term emergency and longer-term social housing options need to be available
- Women and children experiencing “hidden” homelessness ie staying with family or friends or “official” homelessness ie homeless services are at risk of re-traumatisation and of returning to an abusive home situation
- Women may choose to stay in an abusive situation rather than risk homelessness putting them at further risk
- Under recognition of domestic violence as a driver in women and children becoming homeless may reduce the efficiency of state and voluntary “homeless” responses

¹¹ https://www.tcd.ie/news_events/articles/homelessness-among-women-in-ireland-highest-in-europe/;
<http://womenshomelessness.org/>

Recommendations

- **Resource more emergency accommodation/ refuge spaces to comply with Istanbul Convention; there are currently 20 refuges in Ireland spread across 17 counties.**
- **In the Greater Dublin region, there is currently no refuge:**
 - **in the fastest growing area of the region ie North Dublin and has been identified as an area requiring refuge**
 - **in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown which has the combined city populations of Cork and Limerick (Sonas co-ordinated a feasibility study, 2011)**
- **Carry out impact assessment of National Housing Policy and associated guidelines on supporting victims of domestic abuse** ¹²

Gap 4 Legal Supports for Victims of Domestic Abuse

Victims of domestic abuse most often come in contact with the legal system in relation to civil proceedings such as obtaining domestic violence orders and custody and access proceedings. Depending on the type of abuse, victims may also be involved in criminal law proceedings. Engaging with the legal system can be traumatising and re-traumatising for victims.

Many Sonas clients report their dismay at variable judicial responses; their shock at the apparent non-understanding of judges in the area of custody and access to children by the abusive party and how custody and access can and is used to further abuse the child and the non-abusing parent.

The actual court environment can also be a significant contributor to an already stressful situation.

“Some of the most vulnerable members of society seeking to resolve family law proceedings, often arising from relationship and marital breakdown and domestic violence, are currently faced with wholly unsuitable and inconsistent court facilities where not even basic needs are met, such as separate waiting areas, family friendly spaces and consultation rooms to allow for privacy.”

Courting Disaster Campaign Group, 2019

How Sonas responds

- Sonas has a professional staff that provides on average 150 court accompaniments annually and over 1,000 support hours relating to the legal process
- Sonas has a dedicated children’s support team working across Sonas accommodation-based services; this helps support children through safety planning, discussing their emotions etc. It also supports mothers if they have to go to court by ensuring children are looked after
- Sonas women’s support teams works across all services to support women around the legal process

Recommendations

- **Prioritise development of new family law court in Hammond Lane**
- **Develop appropriately resourced (staff and funding) contact centre for children**

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https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/guidance_for_housing_authorities_in_relation_to_assisting_victims_of_domestic_violence.pdf

- Ensure judiciary, court officials and legal representatives are suitably trained in awareness of domestic violence issues

Gap 5 Under-recognition of Economic and Financial Impact of Domestic Abuse

"Women who experience violence suffer a range of health problems and their ability to participate in the public life is diminished. [...] Violence impoverishes women, their families, communities and nations. It lowers economic productivity, drains resources from public services and employers and reduces human capital formation."¹³

How this impacts...

10. In a recent KPMG study commissioned by Vodafone, it was estimated that the potential loss of earnings per woman per year as result of abuse having a negative impact on career progression was equated to be €5,648 with more than 5,000 working women have taken time off work in the past year because of domestic abuse. Absences as a result of domestic were reckoned to have led to a loss of economic output for Irish businesses of up to €26 million.
11. ***"In 2011, the economic costs of violence against women in the EU were estimated to be 228 billion euro each year. Of this total, 45 billion euro is needed for services for victims, 24 billion for the loss of economic output and 159 billion on pain and suffering. The costs of prevention are less than the costs of violence according to the 2014 European Parliament Parvanova report on recommendations on violence against women."¹⁴***
12. **The costs of domestic violence to the Irish economy are reckoned to be €2.2billion¹⁵. We spend less than 1% of costs on responding and preventing domestic abuse (approximately €20m/ Tusla domestic violence commissioned services budget.)**

Recommendations

- Increase spend on supports to victims of abuse above 1% of costs to at least 4% in recognition of the costs of domestic violence to the overall economy and to individual victims
- Provide paid leave and social protection provisions to victims of domestic abuse similar to that of New Zealand

¹³ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556931/IPOL_STU\(2016\)556931_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556931/IPOL_STU(2016)556931_EN.pdf), p20 citing UN Secretary-General, Factsheet Ending violence against women: from words to action, October 2006, available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/launch/english/v.a.w-consequenceE-use.pdf>

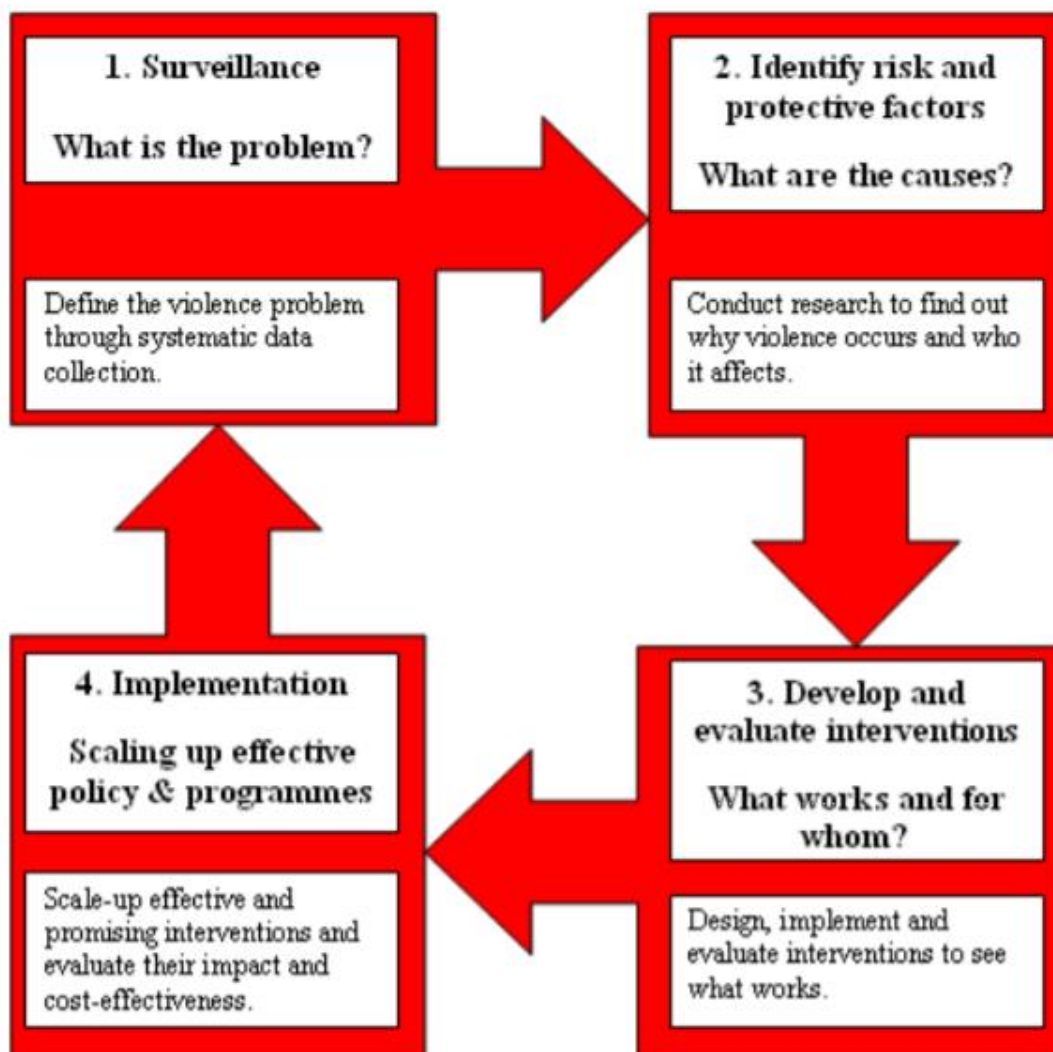
¹⁴ Cited in: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556931/IPOL_STU\(2016\)556931_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556931/IPOL_STU(2016)556931_EN.pdf), p.21

¹⁵ <https://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/domestic-violence-costs-the-country-22bn-63873.html>

Appendix 1

The Public Health Approach

The public health approach is directly linked with the primary prevention of violence, and addresses the issue at a population-level, seeking to improve the safety of all individuals by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that the individual will become a victim or perpetrator of violence. It consists of four steps: 1. Surveillance 2. Identification of risk and protective factors 3. Development and evaluation of interventions 4. Implementation



WHO (2007)

<http://www.who.int/violenceprevention/en/> accessed 18/01/08

