

# Addressing domestic, sexual and gender-based violence

## Part One: Overview

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10 November 2021

**ABSTRACT:** This L&RS Note is Part One of a three-part L&RS research paper series on addressing gender-based violence (GBV). In Ireland, research shows that 15% of women and 6% of men have experienced severely abusive behaviour by a partner at some point in their lifetime, and 3,214<sup>\*1</sup> incidents of sexual offences were reported to An Garda Síochána in the year to Q2 2021. GBV has been linked with a range of negative outcomes for survivors of GBV and their children including death and serious physical injury, mental health problems and suicide, pregnancy complications for women, and poor educational outcomes for children. Research in Ireland found that the national cost of domestic violence to survivors is estimated to be €56 billion over a woman's journey to safety (20.5 years), or €2.7 billion per year. The first part in this L&RS research paper series provides information on the prevalence of GBV and key causes and risk factors for GBV.



## Introduction

This three-part L&RS research paper series seeks to provide the reader with an understanding of gender-based violence (GBV), evidence-based interventions to address GBV, and interventions adopted across Europe.

More specifically, the research papers seek to answer the following key questions:

- 1. How common is GBV in Ireland?**
- 2. What are the main consequences of GBV?**
- 3. What are the causes and risk factors for GBV?**
- 4. What are some intervention approaches for addressing GBV according to research?**
- 5. What are other European nations doing to address GBV?**

Part One of the research paper series (this *Note*) addresses questions 1-3 (above) about the prevalence, consequences, and causes of GBV.

Part Two addresses question 4 (above) by providing an overview of interventions to address GBV across five intervention categories which are:

1. Criminal justice interventions
2. Interventions in healthcare settings
3. Education-based interventions
4. Economic interventions
5. Community-level interventions

Part Three addresses question 5 (above) by presenting an overview of strategies and national action plans (NAPs) to address GBV from across Europe. The Department of Justice is currently leading the development across government of Ireland's third national strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence, which is due for publication in the coming months.

## What is GBV?

The European Commission<sup>2</sup> and United Nations<sup>3</sup> define GBV as violence which is directed against a person because of their gender. They further state that GBV is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms and that while both women and men experience GBV, most survivors of GBV are women and girls.

GBV can include sexual, physical, mental and economic harm inflicted in public or in private. It also includes threats of violence, coercion and manipulation. GBV can take many forms including domestic violence, sexual violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and so-called 'honour crimes'.

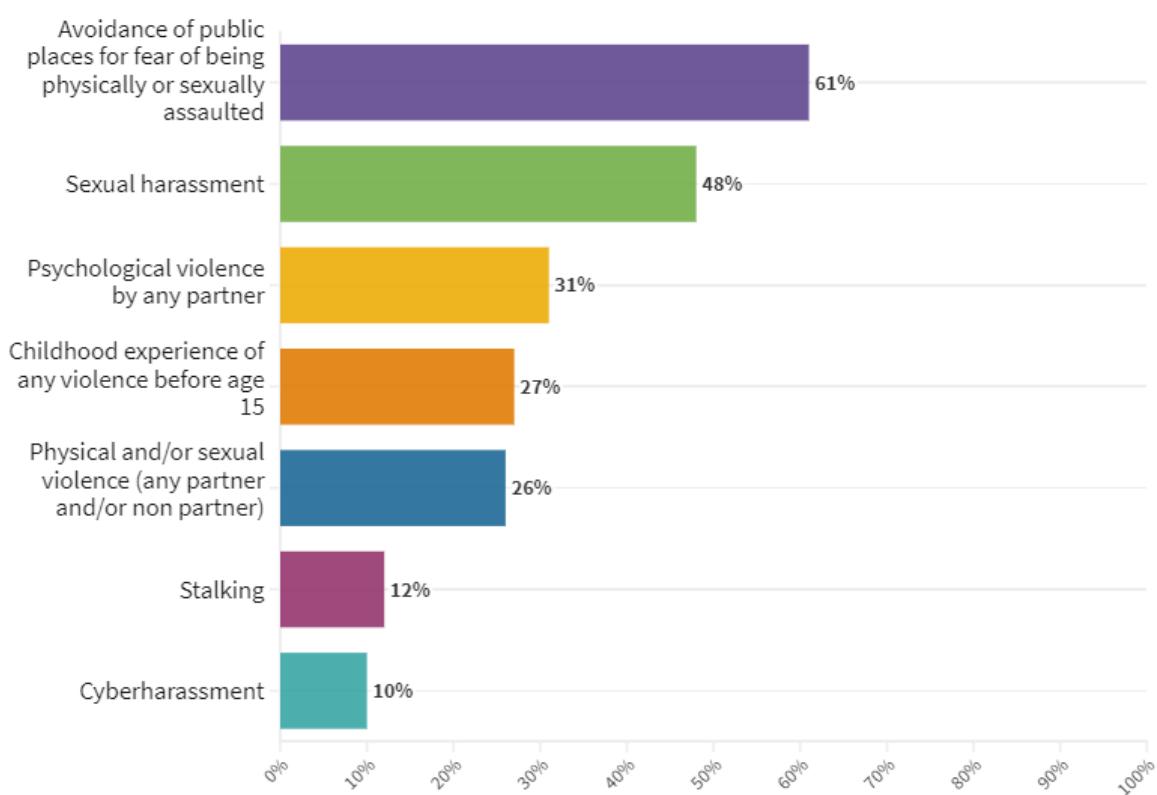
GBV is violence which is directed against a person because of their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms.

## How common is GBV in Ireland?

A 2005 survey by the National Crime Council and the ESRI<sup>4</sup> found that 15% of women and 6% of men have experienced severe abuse by a current or former partner in their lifetime. While more recent prevalence data on GBV are lacking in Ireland, a 2014 European Union survey<sup>5</sup> examined violence against women (VAW) across EU Member States. It reported that in Ireland one in four women (26%) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15. Figure 1 reports further prevalence statistics for Ireland from this survey.

In examining statistics on the prevalence of GBV, it is important to keep in mind that GBV is systematically under-reported. Under-reporting can occur for various reasons including cultural acceptability of violence, a nation's level of gender equality, exposure to risk factors for violence, and a nation's overall level of violent crime<sup>6</sup>. As a result, these prevalence statistics likely represent the minimum level of GBV in Ireland.

*Figure 1: Statistics on the prevalence and impact of violence against women aged 15 and older and children in Ireland*



Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014)

Statistics on various other forms of GBV in Ireland are provided in Box 1 overleaf.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, evidence shows that the reporting of GBV against both women and men has increased. In February 2021, Safe Ireland<sup>7</sup> reported that, on average, at least 2,018 women and 550 children accessed supports from a domestic violence service each month from September to December 2020. Additionally, over 2,445 new women and 486 new children contacted a domestic violence service for the first time over this four-month period. On

average, 167 women and 265 children stayed in a range of domestic violence accommodation each month between September and December, with Safe Ireland reporting that a total of 808 requests for refuge could not be met due to lack of space. Men's Aid<sup>8</sup>, the national service supporting men and their families experiencing domestic violence, reported that in 2020 their helpline dealt with approximately 5,500 contacts and they expect this figure to grow in 2021 to around 9,000. They further reported a high volume of missed calls to the helpline due to resource constraints<sup>9</sup>.

#### **Box 1: Other GBV statistics for Ireland:**

**13,438:** The number of contacts to the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre National 24-hour Helpline in 2020.

**24,686:** The number of incidents of domestic abuse reported to An Garda Síochána in 2021 (up to September 2021).

**3,214\***: The number of sexual offences recorded by An Garda Síochána in the year to Q2 2021 (up 7.5% on 2020 figures).

**22,970:** The number of applications to the District Court under the domestic violence legislation (up 12% on 2019).

**8,887:** The number of applications for safety orders in 2020 (up 10% on 2019). Of this, 2,467 safety orders were granted.

**4,000:** The number of criminal charges created in 2020 for breaches of Domestic Violence Act Orders.

**5,948:** The number of incidents of child abuse disclosed to Women's Aid in 2020 (up 24% on 2019).

Sources: Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, [Statistics Supplement 2020](#); Dáil Éireann Debate, [Domestic Violence](#), 15 September 2021; An Garda Síochána, [Annual Report \(2020\)](#); Courts Service, [Annual Report 2020](#); CSO, [Recorded Crime Q2 2021](#); Women's Aid, [Annual Impact Report 2020](#). \*These statistics are categorised as 'Under Reservation' which indicates that their quality doesn't meet the standards required of official statistics published by the CSO.

## What are the main consequences of GBV?

Research shows that GBV has a wide range of often long-lasting consequences for both survivors of GBV and children who witness it. Some of these are summarised in Table 1 overleaf.

The associated cost of GBV for survivors are also significant. Safe Ireland and NUI Galway<sup>10</sup> published a report in July 2021 which estimated the economic costs of domestic violence for women in Ireland. The findings of the study are based on in-depth interviews with 50 women<sup>11</sup> over the period between July 2017 and May 2018. It employs an accounting framework methodology<sup>12</sup> to estimate both direct (e.g. healthcare and legal costs) and indirect (e.g. foregone income, property damage, relocation) costs incurred in the period from their abusive relationship to safety. It does not consider the cost to the State, including the cost of service provision. Based on their analysis, it is estimated that the average total cost of domestic violence is €113,475 per woman. Using prevalence data from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014), the authors estimate that the national economic cost of domestic violence in Ireland to survivors is approximately €56 billion over a 20.5-year period, or €2.7 billion each year.

Table 1: Outcomes of GBV for survivors and their children

Non-fatal outcomes			
Fatal outcomes	Physical	Psychological Behavioural	Children
Suicide Homicide Maternal mortality	Bruises/black eye	Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	Injuries
	Broken bones	Depression, anxiety, panic disorders	PTSD
	Stab and/or burn wounds	Attempted suicide/suicidal tendencies	Depression, anxiety, panic disorders
	Permanent disabilities	Low self-esteem	Learning difficulties
	Functional impairments	Eating disorders	Self-injurious behaviour
	Psycho-somatic consequences (e.g. chronic pain syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome)		Suicidal tendencies
			Behaviour problems
	Sexual / Reproductive	Economic & Financial	Social
	Pregnancy complications and miscarriage	Put into debt by perpetrator	Isolation from friends, family, and community
	Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)	No access to money/assets	
	Vaginal or rectal injuries	Homelessness	
	Unwanted pregnancy	Unemployment, absenteeism, presenteeism, lost income and reduced productivity	

Source: Doyle and McWilliams (2018); Duvvury et al. (2013); Morrison et al. (2004)<sup>13</sup>

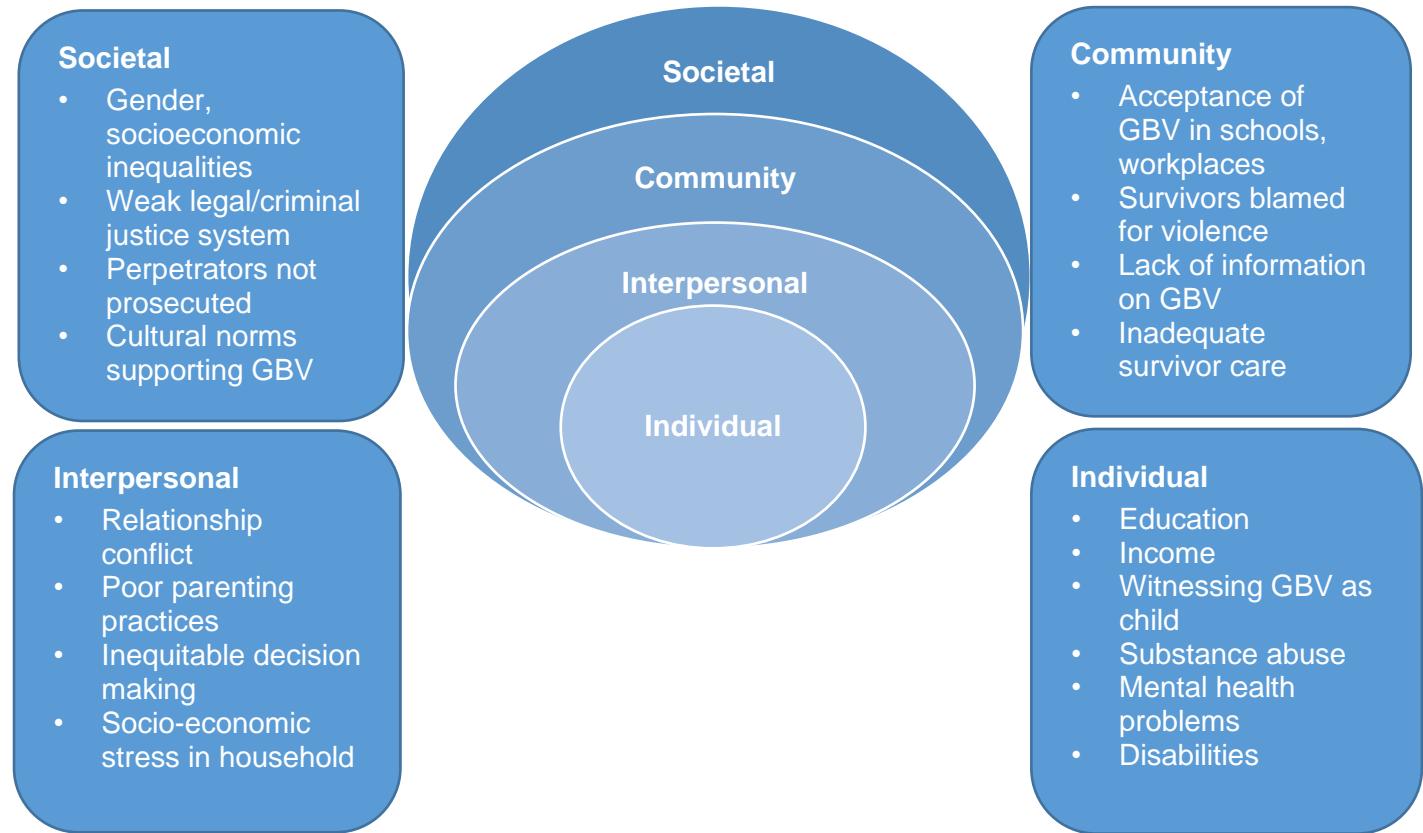
Research also shows that GBV has a range of negative consequences for society at large. These include an increased burden on the healthcare system associated with injuries and long-term health problems, underachievement in work and education and decreased worker productivity, and homelessness (usually associated with domestic violence). A forthcoming 2021 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) [study](#)<sup>14</sup> estimated that the cost of GBV in EU Member States was more than €366 billion in 2019. This figure includes lost economic output, health services, criminal and civil justice costs, social welfare, personal costs, specialist services and physical/emotional impacts. Violence against women accounts for 79% of this cost (€290 billion).

## What are the causes of and risk factors for GBV?

The ecological model is one accepted model<sup>15</sup> for organising causes or risk factors for GBV. It shows how risk factors exist across a range of levels (individual, interpersonal, community and societal), each of which interact with each other. An understanding of the ecological model tells us that because these levels inter-relate, no two pathways to GBV are identical, and that to prevent

GBV we must address risk factors across all different levels. Figure 2 provides an overview of the ecological model for GBV, which is explained in more detail below.

*Figure 1: Examples of risk factors for GBV across different levels*



Source: Adapted from Heise (1998)<sup>16</sup>; Michau et al., 2015<sup>17</sup>

**Personal/individual level risk factors:** Risk factors for GBV which are associated with an individual's personal history and circumstances. These can influence a person's likelihood of experiencing or perpetrating GBV. For example, low income levels can limit one's ability to live independently of a violent partner, while witnessing GBV as a child may 'normalise' it as acceptable.

**Interpersonal/relationship level risk factors:** Personal relationships with intimate partners, family and friends may influence one's likelihood of experiencing GBV. For instance, GBV is more likely in relationships where there is a high level of conflict, while a survivor of GBV may have less opportunity to escape violence where assets and decision-making are in the perpetrator's control.

**Community level risk factors:** Studies show that individual and interpersonal risk factors interact with, and may be compounded by community and societal level factors. Community contexts can increase or decrease both the likelihood of experiencing GBV and of being able to access supports for GBV. Examples of community level risk factors for GBV include the lack of knowledge on or acceptance of GBV in schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces and lack of adequate survivor care in communities.

**Societal level risk factors:** Societal factors influence whether violence is encouraged or inhibited. Societal level risk factors include discriminatory or weak legal frameworks which create a culture of

impunity in the criminal justice system, economic and social policies which maintain gender inequalities, and social norms that endorse GBV as acceptable.

A final point worth mentioning in relation to risk factors for GBV is that risk factors for GBV interact with existing forms of discrimination (e.g. those based on ethnicity, race, ability/disability, sexuality, class, age) in ways which make people both more likely to experience GBV and less able to access help for GBV. To give some examples, research has found that women and girls with disabilities are significantly more likely to experience GBV due to their exposure to a wider range of potential perpetrators (more people on whom they are dependant) and vulnerable settings (e.g. institutions, group-homes) than their non-disabled peers<sup>18</sup>. Other research indicates that LGBTQ, Traveller and Roma survivors of GBV are more likely to face discriminatory attitudes and treatment from police and healthcare workers, which may limit their ability to access help<sup>19</sup>. In relation to this, the Department of Justice published *Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence: An Audit of Structures* (2021)<sup>20</sup> concludes that:

Societal inequalities such as ethnicity, race, ability/disability, sexuality, class and age interact with risk factors for GBV to increase the likelihood of experiencing GBV

Among the needs not provided for [by current or previous structures] are interventions for victims [of GBV] who are migrants; sex workers, victims of human trafficking, forced marriages, FGM [female genital mutilation]; members of the Travellers and Roma communities.

The next part of this L&RS research paper series, Part Two, considers evidence-based interventions to address GBV.

### Where can I get help for domestic, sexual and gender-based violence?

[Women Aid Ireland](#) have a 24/7 helpline for people experiencing domestic violence which can be contacted on 1800 341 900

[Men's Aid Ireland](#) have a helpline for men experiencing domestic violence. It is open Monday-Friday from 9am to 5pm and can be contacted on 01 554 3811

[Immigrant Council of Ireland](#) give advice on migrant women's rights and GBV

[The Rape Crisis Centre](#) have a 24/7 helpline for people who have experienced sexual violence or harassment. It can be contacted on 1800 77 8888

[Irish Family Planning Association \(IFPA\)](#) provide a specialised clinic for women and girls affected by female genital mutilation. It can be contacted between 9am and 5pm on 01 872 7088

Citizens information provide information on where to report and receive support for human trafficking on their webpage which is available [here](#)

<sup>1</sup>\* These statistics are categorised as ‘Under Reservation’ which indicates that their quality doesn’t meet the standards required of official statistics published by the CSO. See [Crime and Justice - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (n.d.) [What is gender-based violence?](#)

<sup>3</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (n.d.). [Gender-based Violence](#).

<sup>4</sup> National Crime Council and ESRI (2005). [Domestic Abuse of Women and Men in Ireland. Report on the National Study of Domestic Abuse](#).

<sup>5</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014). [Violence against women: an EU-wide survey](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

<sup>6</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014). [Violence against women: an EU-wide survey](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

<sup>7</sup> Safe Ireland (2021). [Tracking the Shadow Pandemic – Lockdown 2. A report on women and children seeking support from Domestic Violence Services September 2020 – December 2020](#).

<sup>8</sup> Men’s Aid (n.d.) [Response to the recent publication “Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence – An Audit of Structures”](#).

<sup>9</sup> Irish Times (2021). [Helpline for male domestic abuse victims struggles to cope amid pandemic surge](#)

<sup>10</sup> Safe Ireland and NUI Galway (2021). [Assessing the Social and Economic Costs of DV: A Summary Report](#).

<sup>11</sup> The authors used a sampling strategy to ensure diversity. To this end, it stratifies domestic violence services (e.g. by geographic location, service size, etc) and participant variables (e.g. by age, ethnicity, location, type of domestic violence experience and duration accessing a domestic violence service).

<sup>12</sup> The accounting framework is a core methodology used in most costing studies to establish the direct and indirect costs of domestic violence.

<sup>13</sup> Doyle, J., & McWilliams, M. (2018). [Intimate partner violence in conflict and post-conflict societies: Insights and lessons from Northern Ireland](#). Edinburg: Political Settlements Research Programme (PSRP); Duvvury, N., Callan, A., Carney, P. and Raghavendra, S. (2013), [Intimate Partner Violence: Economic Costs and Implications for Growth and Development](#). Women’s voice, agency and participation research series. No. 3. World Bank. Washington D.C.; Morrison, A.R., Ellsberg, M. and Bott, S., 2004. [Addressing gender-based violence in the Latin American and Caribbean region: a critical review of interventions](#). World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3438

<sup>14</sup> EIGE (forthcoming), The costs of gender-based violence in the European Union. Luxembourg: Publications office of the European Union. Report requested and provided to author.

<sup>15</sup> The ecological model was originally developed as a framework for understanding key factors that contribute to intimate partner violence, but it has been adapted to examine GBV more generally. Essentially it incorporates known risk factors for GBV across different levels. It is used widely, including by the United Nations, World Health Organisation and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, although they tend to use it with a specific focus on violence against women and girls.

<sup>16</sup> Heise, L. L. (1998). Violence Against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework. *Violence Against Women*, 4(3), 262–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801298004003002>

<sup>17</sup> Michau, L., Horn, J., Bank, A., Dutt, M., & Zimmerman, C. (2015). Prevention of violence against women and girls: lessons from practice. *Lancet (London, England)*, 385(9978), 1672–1684. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(14\)61797-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61797-9)

<sup>18</sup> Dunkle, K., van der Heijden, I., Stern, E., & Chirwa, E. (2018). [Disability and Violence against Women and Girls Emerging Evidence from the What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls Global Programme](#).

<sup>19</sup> Calton, J.M., Cattaneo, L.B. and Gebhard, K.T., 2016. [Barriers to help seeking for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer survivors of intimate partner violence](#). Trauma, violence, & abuse, 17(5), pp.585-

600; Pavee Point (2013), [Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality and Defence on the issue of domestic violence.](#)

<sup>20</sup> Department of Justice (2021). [Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence: An Audit of Structures.](#)

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