

News Aid

May 2001 Issue 6

Newsletter of the
Northern Ireland
Women's Aid
Federation



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SAYS DOMESTIC ABUSE CAN BE TORTURE

For the first time, an international human rights organization has defined domestic violence as a form of torture and a violation of international law. In a report issued around the world on March 6, Amnesty International (AI) declared that violence against women is a human rights issue, and if a government fails to "prevent, prosecute and punish" acts of violence, that violence should be considered torture.

Broken Bodies, Shattered Minds: Torture and Ill -Treatment of Women explores the circumstances in which violence against women, in custody and in the home, constitutes torture. It concludes that governments should be held accountable for violence against women, regardless of where it occurs.

AI used a human rights framework to look at violence against women throughout the world. The report documents cases in which states have ignored or condoned violence against women that is committed by government agents, during armed conflict, and by private individuals. "Women are victims of torture throughout the world," said Amnesty International USA Executive Director William F. Schulz, "and even when that torture is not committed by government agents, governments are complicit when they do not do

enough to stop the violence."

As part of its campaign to end torture, AI holds states accountable for all acts of torture of women, whatever the context in which they are committed and whoever is the perpetrator.

Violence Against Women

Violence against women is a "global phenomenon" and throughout the world, women are victims of torture and abuse, finds *Broken Bodies, Shattered Minds*. The torture and abuse of women is rooted in a global culture that denies women equal rights with men. In fact, the report notes that social and cultural norms that deny women equal rights with men make women more vulnerable to physical, sexual and mental abuse. "The common thread is discrimination against women, the denial of basic human rights to

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The views expressed in this newsletter should not necessarily be taken as Women's Aid policy.

If you would like to contribute to Newsaid, please let us know your views, ideas, comments or queries by email, fax or post to Charlene at NIWAF.

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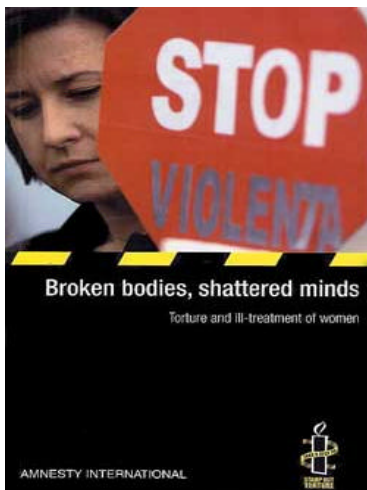
individuals simply because they are women," states *Broken Bodies, Shattered Minds*.

The report concludes that, when a government has failed to take the necessary measures to prevent violence, and when the violence is intentionally inflicted and causes severe pain or suffering, these acts are torture. *Broken Bodies, Shattered Minds* explores the extent of torture in the home (domestic violence), in forced marriages, in the name of "honour," among trafficked women, and of women in debt bondage. It finds that "women's greatest risk of violence comes...from men they know, often male family members or husbands."

Recommendations for Change

Broken Bodies, Shattered Minds offers recommendations for all governments to implement through laws to improve the condition of women and to stop violence against women.

Amnesty also calls on intergovernmental bodies working to stop torture to ensure that their work is gender-sensitive; that they identify, collect and use gender-specific data; and that they apply gender analysis to monitoring and reporting torture.



Broken Bodies, Shattered Minds: Torture and Ill-Treatment of Women is available online at www.aiusa.org and in the NIWAF library.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ONLINE



The emergence of the Internet has made information on domestic violence readily available to anyone who has access to a computer and a modem. Typing the words "domestic violence" in an Internet search engine can pull up more than 160,000 hits (web sites that include the words used in the search). The resources available to domestic violence victims and their advocates are overwhelming. There are web sites that offer information and statistics on domestic violence, sites with links to domestic violence studies and reports, and home pages for domestic violence service organisations.

The Internet can be a fast and reliable source for finding information, but not all the statistics included on domestic violence web sites are correct. The content on many web sites has not been fact checked, and many statistics do not include citations.

Web site editors do not always post accurate information, so it is up to the Internet user to **take care** to pick up statistics that have full and reliable citations.

Goto page 6 for some useful website addresses.

EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT FLOATING SUPPORT BUT WERE TOO AFRAID TO ASK....

by Eithne Gilligan, NIWAF

If you thought Floating Support was a means of holding your head above water until you felt safer with the doggy paddle, then this is the article for you!

Floating Support has emerged from the provision of supported housing. It is the delivery of services for a limited period of time to people in their own homes or rented accommodation with the aim of maintaining independent living. Once a person no longer needs support it can “float off “ to someone else to help them to maintain independent living in ordinary housing.

Floating Support and Women’s Aid

If all of this sounds rather familiar to you in Women’s Aid then that’s hardly surprising. Women’s Aid centres and aftercare services have been providing Floating Support for years and didn’t even know it!

The shared core aims of Women’s Aid groups across Northern Ireland clearly acknowledge the need for

ongoing support for women who have experienced domestic violence. As Monica McWilliams said so clearly, it’s crucial that support services remain in place when a woman leaves the refuge to set up a new home of her own or to return home with a non-molestation order. Women’s Aid offers support far beyond the point of crisis to women leaving refuge and to women in their own homes coming to terms with their abusive experiences.

Floating Support ...

- ◇ assists people to “stay put” in ordinary housing;
- ◇ it averts tenancy breakdown and prevents homelessness; and
- ◇ it reduces the need for unnecessary moves to institutional forms of accommodation.

Floating Support and Money

What’s different now is that there is an opportunity for these services to attract statutory funding. Instead of being the poor relation to refuge services which are funded by Housing

Benefit, these community and centre based services will be eligible for funding in their own right.

As part of the Supporting People policy, funding for Floating Support services will be made available through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. It is hoped that a number of projects across Northern Ireland will receive pilot funding this year as part of the preparation for Supporting People. Proposals from Women’s Aid are among the bids being considered by the NIHE. As the aims of Floating Support and the services in place in many Women’s Aid groups are so similar, there is cause for optimism that these services will now receive the recognition and financial support needed to maintain and develop them.

If you want to find out more about Floating Support take a look at “Floating Support – a SITRA Workbook” which is available in the NIWAF library. Also, check out the NIHE website on www.nihe.gov.uk for their posting on Supporting People and Floating Support.

The assessment of ‘Significant Harm’* in the Northern Ireland Courts

At a recent conference on Significant Harm in Northern Ireland, The Honourable Justice Gille, (Northern Ireland High Court Judge, Family Division) addressed an audience made up of legal and social work professionals and voluntary sector groups on the assessment of significant harm in the Northern Ireland Courts. His speech emphasised the need for a dramatic change in attitudes and actions towards children and domestic violence amongst the legal and social work professions. The following text is taken directly from his speech.

“There is no doubt that there is a gathering momentum of concern about the ways in which the consequences of domestic violence are managed by professionals and decided by courts. For too long we have seen this cancer of domestic violence only in terms of physical harm directly visited upon children whilst ignoring the enormous harm that is more subtly occasioned to them either witnessing violence, hearing it occurring or being part of its aftermath.

If anyone wishes to enhance their own knowledge of these concerns I recommend that they read Caroline McGee’s book ‘Childhood Experience of Domestic Violence’, a book that provides a vivid insight into the lives of women and children living with domestic violence. It poignantly allows mothers and unusually children to speak for themselves and explain what they would find useful. The book is based on a research study in which 54 mothers and 48 children were interviewed. In over 70% of the families where there was domestic violence, the children witnessed the mothers being physically assaulted. Over half of the children were found to have been physically abused themselves and emotional abuse was found in almost two thirds of the families. My concern is the other half who were not physically abused themselves as well as those who suffered emotional abuse. The children clearly suffered grievously from witnessing violence

to their mothers as is terrifyingly evidenced by the descriptions of the impact on them of their experiences in this book.

It has been addressed comprehensively and tellingly in the consultation paper from Mr Justice Wall, Children Act Sub-Committee of the Advisory Board and Family Law ‘Contact Between Children and Violent Parents’ (Lord Chancellors Department, 1999) in the context of contact. The approach has been widely welcomed and endorsed by child psychologists, psychiatrists and lawyers. The report says at paragraph 2.49:

“ In cases where physical or psychological domestic violence has been directed at the mother and not at the children, but where the children have witnessed the violence or are aware of it. The court needs to consider the messages, both open and covert, which the father may be giving to the children in contact. The traditional concept may have been that a father who abuses his children’s mother could, nevertheless, be a ‘good father’ to his children. That concept needs to be questioned. We are increasingly aware of intergenerational factors in which children learn violent habits from their violence parents.”

We must learn to see that significant harm occurs not only when children are in fear and trembling of a violent father, but when the children acquire learned behaviour of violent habits which they themselves often visit upon their mother having seen the success of their father in so behaving and then proceed to further visit a violent milieu on their children. That is an area of significant harm which we pass by at our peril.

continued on page 5

*** ‘Significant Harm’ is the term used in the Children’s Order (N.I), under which the courts are to consider the needs of children involved in cases presented to them.**

Dame Elizabeth Butler-Ross summed up the concept well in the recent seminal contact case of Re L (2000) 2 FLR 340 when she said:

“ The family judges and magistrates need to have a heightened awareness of the existence of and consequences (some long term), on children of exposure to domestic violence between their parents or other partners. there has, perhaps, been a tendency in the past for courts not to tackle allegations of violence and leave them in the background on the premise that they were matters affecting the adults and not relevant to the issues regarding the children.”

I regard this as an essential starting point when we view domestic violence in the context of significant harm. In looking at whether the child is likely to suffer significant harm in the future we in the courts must address the future. Children cannot wait indefinitely for parents to change. Mr Justice Wall said:

“ Often in these cases where domestic violence has been found, too little weight in my judgement is given to the need for the father to change. It is often said that, notwithstanding the violence, the mother must nonetheless bring up the children with full knowledge and a positive image of their natural father and arrange for their children to be available for contact. Too often it seems to me that the courts neglect the other set of that equation which is that a father, like this father, must demonstrate that he is a fit person to exercise contact; that he is not going to destabilise the family; that he is not going to upset the children and harm them emotionally.”

Let me conclude by touching on one other matter which I think is relevant to the concept of the assessment of significant harm. We must all be careful that in seeking to analyse and perhaps solve the problems arising out of significant harm, in turn we do not become part of the problem. The legal process must not itself become an impediment to the recognition and diagnosis of significant harm.

Moreover the courts themselves must be user friendly for all those appearing before it charged with the task of ensuring the best interest of the child. The court must ensure that social workers and other experts, both medial and non medical, are accorded a dignified and informed hearing backed up if necessary by judicial intervention to protect witnesses from over robust or unfair cross examination. Through the various committees on which I have the privilege to serve since becoming a family judge, the message has not infrequently been conveyed to me that many social workers and other professional witnesses are at times genuinely intimidated by the process, even to the extent of manifesting a reluctance to engage in the legal system. I am sure that this can be, and often is, overstated, but nonetheless it is crucial that we as lawyers and judges recognise it as a core problem and take steps to address it.

The legal system must not sit in isolation but rather enter into equal partnership with outside agencies in order to ensure that significant harm to children is appropriately and adequately addressed. Everyone must have a seat at the table in what is a developing field. The development of the law must not get out of step with its legislative genesis and from that principle there can be no departure. Children do not understand the world in the same way as adults and they respond differently.

“It would be the ultimate irony if the process which is meant to address significant harm in the event became an instrument of perpetuating that harm.”

Significant harm as a concept is only relevant to their needs and protection in so far as it reflects an accurate and meaningful appreciation of their responses to given situations within the family context. Child protection is multi-disciplinary. Co-operation and collaboration between the different agencies, including the courts is the most effective way of assessing and interpreting significant harm in an appropriate manner and thereby preventing abuse and protecting the abused.”

The Honourable Justice Gillen, (Northern Ireland High Court Judge, Family Division) .

Abuse, Harassment and Violence - Hidden Life of Irish Teens

Irish teenagers have high levels of contact with violence, abuse and harassment according to "Teenage Tolerance", research launched in February by Dublin Women's Aid.

- ◆ 95% of young women and 84% of young men reported knowing someone who had experienced abuse, violence and harassment ranging from being followed, to being forced to have sex, to being hit by a partner. The persons known were mainly young women.
- ◆ 1 in 4 young women knew someone who was forced to have sex, with over 76% of those known being friends. The research also indicates that young people are not reporting their experiences to parents, teachers or other adults, but instead are just telling their friends.

According to Denise Charlton, Director of Women's Aid:

"The findings of this research are not just alarming, they also indicate how, as a society, we are failing our young people. With limited sex and lifeskills education, and few support systems for young people, we are leaving young people to cope with these issues alone or with each other."

The report also highlights confusion amongst young people about the meaning of rape, violence, and consent. 19% of young women and 34% of young men did not think being forced to have sex is rape.

The report also indicated that there is a high level of exposure to pornography, particularly amongst

young men. Of the 94% of young men, who had contact with pornography, 3 out of 4 accessed pornography on the Internet, mainly on home computers or friends' computers.

Both young men and young women fear physical attack in public places such as the street, nightclubs and bars, however young women also fear sexual assault and being drug raped.

Dublin Women's Aid is calling on the Department of Education and Science to implement the recommendations outlined in the research, which includes funding for existing support services to target young people, and a mainstreamed education programme.

A poster campaign entitled "Tell Someone" was also launched by B*Witched to encourage young people to contact Women's Aid or the Rape Crisis Helplines. The poster will hang in schools and youth clubs.

The research was conducted with over 300 young men and women between the ages of 14 and 19, in four Dublin schools and one senior college, through questionnaires and focus groups.

The study was funded by the European Commission and the Department of Education and Science and was carried out in conjunction with Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit, London University..

If you would like to purchase Teenage Tolerance please send £5.00 + £1.50 P/P to Women's Aid, PO Box 791, Dublin 1. There is a copy available for reference in NIWAF's Library.





Annagh House shows all for Comic Relief!

Congratulations to Wendy, Louise, Kathy and Lou from Annagh House (Craigavon & Banbridge Women's Aid) who raised £20.00 for Comic Relief.

Newry open new refuge

Newry Women's Aid refuge officially opened on the 20th March. The new purpose built refuge has 11 units providing a total bed space of 25, two of these units have disabled access.

Courses & Conferences

- ◆ Sssssshhhhhh! It's the need to know.. ICFM Northern Ireland Fundraisers' Convention 2001 6/7th June 2001 Burrendale, Newcastle. Contact: 028 9151 62 69 or visit www.icfm-ni for more information.
- ◆ How to Make High Scoring Applications to the National Lottery Charities - Organised by the Directory of Social Change. These workshops enable you to present high scoring projects by: keeping you up-to-date with new developments, giving detailed information on the assessment and scoring systems, providing solutions to potential difficulties. Fee: from £85 to £120 per delegate. Contact 0151 7080117 or email north@dsc.org.uk for more information.
- ◆ Towards a Safer Society - creating non-violent environments for children and young people. Thursday 21st June 2001 London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre. Contact: conferences@ncb.org.uk Tel: 020 7843 6042/40 Cost £115.00 + VAT or £155.00 +VAT.

Human Rights and Social Security

The Social Security Unit of the Law Centre is looking for a test case on the issue of benefit being stopped pending an appeal. They feel that this may breach the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998. The ideal case would be where Income Support has been stopped for cohabitation, particularly where the evidence against the claimant is weak. If you know of any such cases, with the possibility of referral for immediate judicial review, please contact Odran Stockman at the Law Centre Tel : 028 90244401

Understanding Personality Disorders

The word 'personality' refers to the enduring pattern of thoughts, feelings and outward behaviour which is characteristic of an individual. We tend to behave in relatively predictable ways, yet our personalities also develop and change in response to changed circumstances. Many people are flexible enough to be able to learn from past experiences and change their behaviour in order to cope more effectively.

Personality disorders, on the other hand, are characterized by a long-lasting, inflexible and limited range of attitudes and behaviours which are expressed in a wide variety of settings and which deviate markedly from the expectations of the person's culture and cause distress to the person or to others.

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a severe, chronic, disabling, and potentially lethal psychiatric condition. People who suffer with this disorder have extreme and long standing instability in their emotional lives, as well as

in their behaviour and their self-image. These instabilities of emotion, behaviour, and self-image have devastating and sometimes deadly consequences. People with BPD have repeated and frequent difficulties in their relationships and work lives and they feel alternating extremes of anger, depression, and emptiness.

All too frequently, 69% to 75% of individuals with BPD resort to self-destructive behaviours such as self-mutilation, alcohol and drug abuse, serious over or under eating, and suicide attempts to attempt to escape from their emotional turmoil.

BPD is a common disorder affecting 2% of the general population. The best evidence indicates that about 11% of psychiatric outpatients and 19% of inpatients meet diagnostic criteria for BPD

The completed suicide rate for BPD individuals is 3% to 9.5% , which is comparable to the other serious psychiatric disorders such as depression, alcohol dependence, and

schizophrenia.

Despite the devastating nature of this disorder, it has not received the scientific and clinical attention that other health and psychiatric problems of equal, or even lesser, level of disability have received.

Support for families of those with BPD

If you think you know someone who shows the symptoms of BPD and you would like to get advice and support contact *First Steps to Freedom* via their helpline on 01926851608, through their web page on www.firststeps.demon.co.uk or by email info@firststeps.demon.co.uk. They have an online support group for family and friends of those with BPD they can help you realise you are not alone and help, advise and support you. *Author has provided contact details for those wanting to join a Northern Ireland support group..*

For more info on BPD visit www.borderlinerresearch.org

The NIWAF library also contains some additional information on BPD.



Intern Student from USA

Summer Internships are being arranged by QUB for American law students to come to Northern Ireland under the premise of *Gender, Sexuality and Family: Expanding Norms of International Human Rights*.

One student will be placed in NIWAF, with the following brief:

- ◇ To examine/review the current working of the civil and criminal justice system in relation to domestic violence.
- ◇ To explore the difficulties experienced by women seeking redress through the courts through contact with Women's Aid groups, NIWAF staff and other agencies.

The goal is to draw up, in consultation with NIWAF, a strategy to engage with the legal system to improve practice and effectiveness of legislation.

Equality Project Update

- Equality Training—Disability Awareness & Disability Act Training, 10.30am - 4.00pm 31st May 2001, NICVA, 61 Duncairn Gardens Belfast. for all Women's Aid workers.
- All Women's Aid groups are invited to send representatives to a Travellers Forum planning meeting with the Travellers Support Group on 24th May 2001, 2pm at NIWAF offices.
- The Law Centre is interested in developing a specific Immigration Advice & Information Training session for Women's Aid workers. The session will cover training on support for refugees, asylum seekers and migrant women & children. Anyone interested in joining the planning group please contact the Equality Project
- The South & East Health Trust & Belfast Women's Aid are holding a one day Health Information Day for Minority Ethnic Women. For further information contact Patricia Lynness, Belfast Women's Aid Tel: 02890 666049.
- NIWAF will be meeting with John Harkness from the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) to discuss domestic violence awareness raising initiatives to support women & children from deaf communities. The meeting is on Friday 11th May, 2pm at the RNID offices, Belfast. Anyone wishing to attend or put forward issues to be brought to the meeting should contact the Equality Worker at NIWAF.
- Members from the Ugandan group Equality First will be visiting Belfast on the 21st May 2001 for one week. A number of activities have been planned for the group. There will be an evening reception with song & craic on Thursday 24th May 7pm, Belfast Women's Aid Offices. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Sandra Broghan
Equality Project Worker



CHILDREN HAVE THEIR SAY!

NIWAF's new training video "Hurting, Coping Growing" was launched on Wednesday 8 March 2001. The launch which was held in the Nerve Centre, Derry/L'Derry was attended by over 100 individuals

representing voluntary and statutory agencies, education and youth services.

The day was a great success and the feedback on the video which explores children's experience of domestic violence was all extremely positive. The highlight of the day was a drama performance by a p.3 class from a local primary school who are involved in the pilot programme of the "Helping Hands" pack. Their performance focused on the right to feel safe and who children can talk to when they need support.

A big thanks needs to go to the steering group who helped with the video production from the initial stages right through to the end. The group included, Adeline Mc Clenaghan (North Down and Ards Women's Aid), Katrina Heaney (Foyle Women's Aid), Cynthia Allen (Cookstown and Dungannon Women's Aid) and Bernie Hatton (Craigavon Women's Aid). Also a big thanks to their team leaders for supporting them in their involvement.

Copies of the video are now available from NIWAF offices at a cost of £15 plus £1.50 post & pack.



It's a GIRL! NIWAF WELCOMES NEW STAFF MEMBERS!

Eimear Aylsebury joined the team in April as a training worker with emphasis on criminal justice issues.

New Administration Worker, Arlene Robertson joined the NIWAF team on the 8th May.

CONGRATULATIONS TRACY!

Tracy Morrow, a volunteer in the helpline had a baby girl on the 2nd May. Both mother and daughter are doing well.

Some useful websites....



www.niwaf.org—Our website of course!

www.domesticviolenceforum.org—Website of the Northern Ireland Regional Forum on domestic violence.

www.scottishwomensaid.co.uk This website is designed to be an additional resource for women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse.

www.womensaid.ie—Dublin Women's Aid.

www.womensaid.org.uk—Women's Aid Federation of England .

www.domesticviolencedata.org—UK wide research and information on domestic violence.

www.humanrightsni.gov.uk Northern Ireland Assembly Human Rights.

www.lawcentreni.org The Law Centre.

www.solo.ioi.ie Irish lone parents website aimed at people bringing up children on their own.

www.globalfundforwomen.org New website on global women's issues.

Newsaid

If you would like to submit an article, piece of news, diary date or poetry for September's edition of Newsaid please send it to Charlene at NIWAF before August 20th.

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