



Seed of Sequoia

A practical guide for faith communities responding to domestic and sexual violence and abuse

corrymeela®

Sir Halley
Stewart | Trust

Preface

The seeds that would eventually grow into this project were planted during a car journey. As I drove, Glenn Jordan, Corrymeela's programme manager for Public Theology, spoke about a bible study he had facilitated the previous evening. Glenn was one of Ireland's finest theologians, and he spoke about the story of Hagar with gentleness and wisdom. I was captivated by how his insights about the biblical text offered a new perspective, and permission to explore the brutality of the issues it contained. I reflected on our conversation in light of my own experience of many years working as a domestic and sexual violence practitioner. Over the coming months, together, Glenn and I created a vision. A vision that faith communities might explore the sacred text in new ways, having honest conversations about the injustice and abuse which is present in our society, and our churches. A vision that faith communities, better equipped to understand and respond to abuse, might become a vast and formidable shelter for those marginalised, oppressed, and harmed by violence and abuse in homes throughout our society.

**In memory of Glenn Jordan 1964-2020
Corrymeela Public Theology Manager, 2018-2020**

Our dear friend never got to see the growth and fruition of this work, but with enormous gratitude for his influence, insight, and passion, we dedicate this project to Glenn's memory, and to the women who have lost their lives through domestic violence during the compilation of this resource.

Denise Bradley

Corrymeela Programme Manager Marginalisation, 2021



Our story

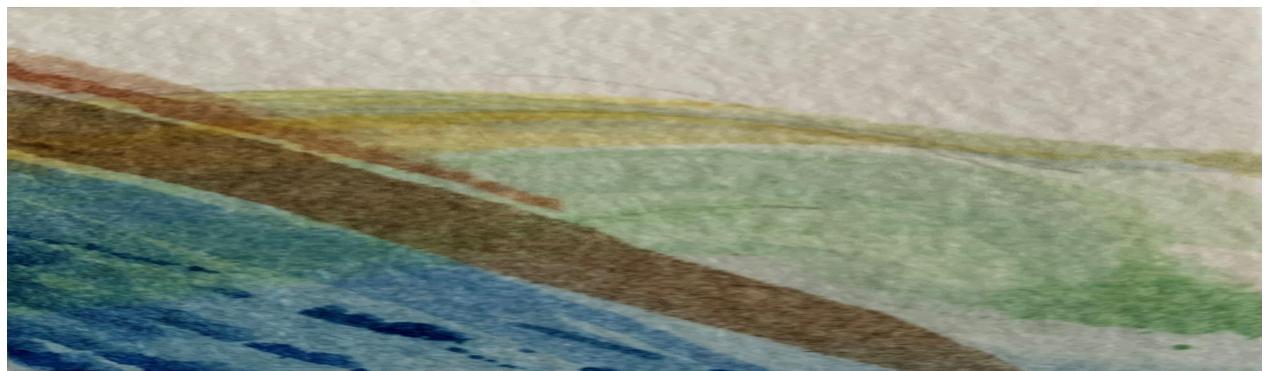
Within the cones of the world's largest and most ancient trees, tiny sequoia seeds open in the extreme heat of forest fires. As the forest burns, new spaces are cleared, and the tiny seeds root deeply into the freshly prepared earth. Over time, the seeds grow into magnificent sheltering trees and, along with the others that grow around them, they create a vast community of structures in which to survive and protect one another.

The vision of the Seed of Sequoia project is that a practice of compassionate theology might enable the growth of formidable shelters of love, kindness, and hope for women and children harmed by the abuse that continues to happen behind closed doors throughout Ireland.

The hope of this resource is to support faith communities in making churches better, safer places for women and children, and to work towards making Ireland's societies free from domestic violence and abuse.

This resource has been designed to be trauma-sensitive with the intention that everyone who wishes to engage with the text and materials can do so with comfort. There are guidance notes attached to support the regulation of the nervous system.

"It is in the shelter of each other that the people live."



Corrymeela Seed of Sequoia Project

Vision

Corrymeela seeks to lead a **faith movement of compassion, courage and hope** in which no one is excluded as a result of gendered discrimination and violence.

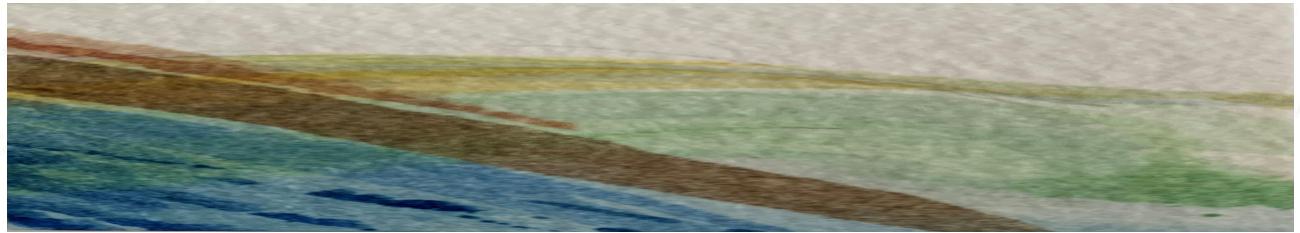
Mission

We believe in a God, compassionate and loving, who abhors violence and injustice against women. We seek to be alongside faith leaders and churches to support survivors experiencing domestic and sexual violence within their communities.

Purpose

We seek to provide study materials and liturgical resources which can deepen our understanding of persistent structural issues that contribute to the continuum of violence against women and girls, working towards a vision of a society free from gender-based discrimination and harm.

"We will listen, however painful the hearing....until there is not one last woman remaining who is a victim of violence."



Beginning conversations

Faith groups are an important part of our civil society, holding the potential to promote stability, solidarity, and a sense of belonging.

Faith leaders and church communities are uniquely positioned to respond with compassion, kindness, and love in situations of domestic violence and abuse. The Scriptures do not hide these realities from us and they echo profoundly and painfully the real fear and violence of many women's lives today. The hope for this resource is to support and equip faith leaders to recognise, respond and refer, and use their positions of power and responsibility to support women and all those affected by domestic violence and abuse.

Entering into conversations about domestic and sexual violence requires courage—extraordinary courage to be open, generous, and compassionate, and to sit with the often painful experiences of oppression, injustice, and suffering.

It is in these spaces we listen with both our hearts and minds.

As we begin these challenging conversations, we offer the Corrymeela prayer for courage:

*Courage comes from the heart
and we are always welcomed by God,
the Croí of all being.*

*We bear witness to our faith,
knowing that we are called to live lives of courage,
love and reconciliation in the ordinary and extraordinary
moments of each day.*

*We bear witness, too, to our failures
and our complicity in the fractures of our world.*

*May we be courageous today.
May we learn today.
May we love today.*

Amen



The extent of domestic and sexual violence

Violence against women – particularly domestic and sexual violence – is a major public and clinical health problem, a criminal justice issue, and a gross violation of human rights. It is rooted in and perpetuates gender inequalities

Anybody can be affected by domestic abuse, regardless of age, social background, gender, religion, sexuality or ethnicity, however women are more likely to be affected. Global estimates published by the World Health Organisation (WHO) indicate that about 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner or non-partner in their lifetime, and as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by a male intimate partner.

Domestic and sexual violence is one of the most prolific forms of injustice in Ireland: deeply embedded, hidden behind closed doors and profoundly traumatic for victims. It is estimated that at least 1 in 4 women will experience domestic and sexual violence in Ireland, north and south of the border. On average, the Police Service of Northern Ireland responds to an incident of domestic abuse every 17 minutes. The reported incidents are only the tip of the iceberg. Scholarly research within the Northern Irish context reveals a high level of political, religious and

ethnic contestation at a societal level, a patriarchal social structure, and conservative attitudes, each of which influence experiences of and responses to domestic violence.

Parishes and church congregations are not immune from this form of violence and abuse within their communities. Churches are often a natural place for people to turn to in times of crisis, and yet sadly, research reveals that women with Christian beliefs are too often prevented from speaking out about the oppression, abuse and violence which they experience. Women can be reluctant about (and sometimes dissuaded from) approaching secular organisations for support, for various religious reasons. This can have dangerous consequences.

One in three women may suffer from abuse and violence in her lifetime. This is an appalling human rights violation, yet it remains one of the invisible and under-recognised pandemics of our time. " (Nicole Kidman)

Warning - the next few pages contain content that refers to violence and abuse

Definition:

Domestic Violence and Abuse:

'Threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, virtual, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability) by a current or former intimate partner or family member.'

Sexual Violence and Abuse:

'Any behaviour (physical, psychological, verbal, virtual/online) perceived to be of a sexual nature which is controlling, coercive, exploitative, harmful, or unwanted that is inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability).'

<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/doj/stopping-domestic-sexual-violence-ni.pdf>

Why does domestic and sexual violence happen?

Research demonstrates that the root cause of domestic and sexual violence (DSV) lies in the unequal power relations between women and men, which ensure male dominance over women, and are a characteristic of human societies throughout the world. The widespread experience of DSV illustrates the complexity and breadth of violence against women, and although it occurs in every country across the globe, its specific shape and texture often relates to the cultural influences and systemic practices within each unique context. DSV causes devastating harm to women's lives and to those of their children. It also hurts the economic and social health of their families, communities, and countries.

While some women are more at risk than others, violence can happen to any woman, in any country, regardless of culture, religion or economic status. Gender inequality (including harmful gender norms) is a key driver of domestic and sexual violence against women.

When we speak of domestic violence, and the cultural factors that foment it, the one crucial element that is often missing from the discussion is religion.

Religion, in many women's lives, has been a force, if not the primary force, in influencing the acceptance of inequality, discrimination, and abuse, and as such it has sustained domestic and sexual violence against women and girls. Women's bodies remain a common battleground in all societies, symbols of all religions' authority and identity. Women will not be safe anywhere until they are safe at home.

"It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain."

Types and effects of domestic abuse and violence:

God is on the side of the oppressed, burdened and abused. The Holy Scriptures are clear in their expression of God's desire for a dramatic transformation of society for those who are marginalised. Jesus modeled that the powerful should give up their privilege to the vulnerable, the abuser stop using violence against those powerless to resist, and the institution should stop ignoring the trauma of the abuse survivor.

"Domestic and sexual violence is defined as *the intentional and persistent* physical or emotional abuse of a woman, or of a woman and her children, in a way that causes pain, distress or injury." (WAFNI) The violence and abuse can be and is experienced in various ways, but it is always about the abuser having and keeping power and control over another person. Within communities of faith, we should do all we can to understand the complex dynamics of domestic and sexual violence.

'Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.' Ephesians 5:1



Warning - the next few pages contain content that refers to violence and abuse.

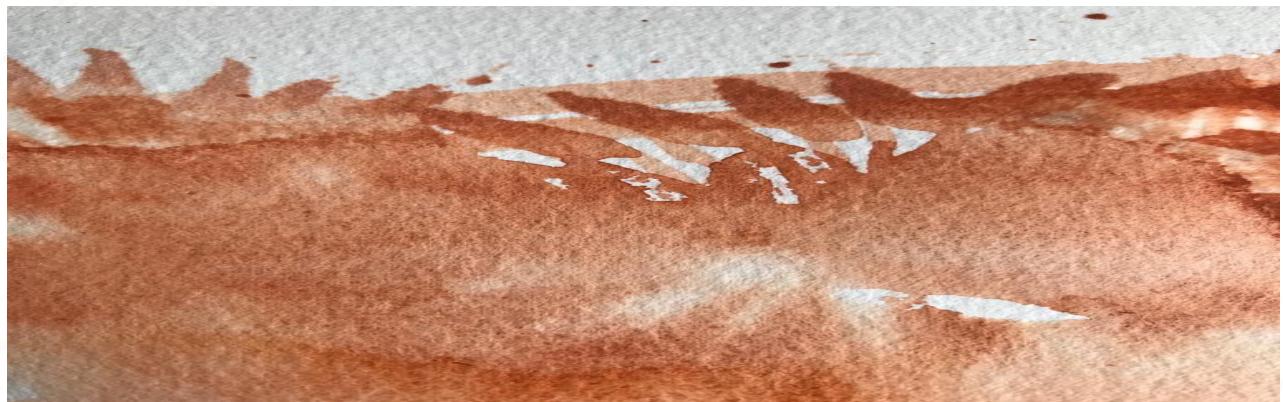
Emotional abuse: is one of the hardest forms of abuse to recognise, and is always present in a relationship where there is domestic violence. It can be subtle and insidious or overt and manipulative. It aims to erode someone's self-esteem, values, and confidence, and as a result, they begin to doubt their perceptions and reality, allowing an abuser to gain power and control.

Types of Emotional Abuse

Name-calling	Threats to kill
Shouting	Bullying tactics
Put-downs/ humiliation (publicly or privately)	Moving the goalposts
Talking over/talking at	Enforcing trivial demands
Intimidating tone	Trivialising the other person's concerns
Isolating from family and friends	Silent treatment
Withholding love, affection, and support	Criticising

Effects of Emotional Abuse

Trying to change self	Depression
Damaged self-esteem and self-confidence	Somatic and unexplained physical pain
Develop negative coping and defense strategies	Anxiety disorders
Walking on 'eggshells'	Eating disorders
Isolating oneself from family/friends	Suicide/ attempted suicide
Loneliness	Alcohol and Drug Misuse



Economic and financial abuse: is designed to reinforce or create economic instability. In this way, it limits a woman's choices and ability to access safety. Lack of access to economic resources can result in women staying with abusive men for longer and experiencing further harm.

Types of Economic Abuse

Controlling money	Having to explain every expenditure to the abuser
Withholding money	Forced into debt
Misspending money/gambling/drinking	Forced to be responsible for all the money
Restricting access to money for basic necessities	

Effects of Economic Abuse

Lack of basic necessities for self and children	No money or financial independence (keeps women isolated and unable to gain educational and employment opportunities)
No control over own money	
Money becomes a focal point	
Unable to leave because of lack of access to money	Powerlessness in decision making

Physical abuse and violence: is the intentional use of physical force, with the potential for causing harm, injury, disability, or death. This is the most widely recognised type of domestic abuse and the most commonly identified.

Types of Physical Abuse and Violence

Burning	Sleep deprivation	Ear pulling
Beating with objects	Pushing /hitting	Slapping
Imprisoning/ restraining	Kicking	Punching
Urinating on	Use of weapons	Pulling on or dragging by the hair
Starving	Stabbing	Throwing objects
Force-feeding	Strangulation	Make as though to hit to cause fear
Spitting	Choking	
	Murder	

Effects of Physical Abuse and Violence

Exhaustion	Bruising	Traumatic stress
Flinching from physical touch	Scars	symptoms
Wary of being examined by health professionals	Weight loss/gain	Hair loss
	Loss of teeth	Hearing loss
	Chronic ill-health	
	Death	

Violence against women is not the result of random, individual acts of misconduct, but rather is deeply rooted in structural relationships of inequality between women and men... Violence constitutes a continuum across the lifespan of women, from before birth to old age. It cuts across both the public and the private spheres.



Sexual abuse: is any unwanted or forced sexual act committed without consent. It can occur either against a person's will, by force or coercion, or when a person is incapable of giving consent, such as when they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Force includes actual physical aggression, threats of physical aggression, emotional coercion, and/or psychological blackmailing.

Types of Sexual Abuse

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| Forcing to dress in a sexual way | Hurting a partner with weapons or objects during sex |
| Insulting someone in sexual ways or using sexualised degrading names | Involving other people in sexual activities against partner's will |
| Manipulating a partner into having sex or performing sexual acts | Tampering with and or withholding contraception |
| Holding someone down during sex | Forcing a partner to watch pornography |
| Demanding sex when a partner is ill or tired, or after hurting them | |

Effects of Sexual Abuse

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|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Vaginal injury and bleeding | Miscarriage/stillbirth |
| Pelvic pain and infection | Premature/low birth weight babies |
| Bruising | Fear of being examined |
| Signs of force/use of bondage | Psychological trauma |
| Sexually Transmitted Infections | |
| Unplanned Pregnancies | |



What is sexual coercion?

Making someone feel like they owe the abuser sex: because they're in a relationship, because they've had sex before, because the abuser has spent money on them or bought them a gift, and/ or for the sake of being a dutiful and attractive wife

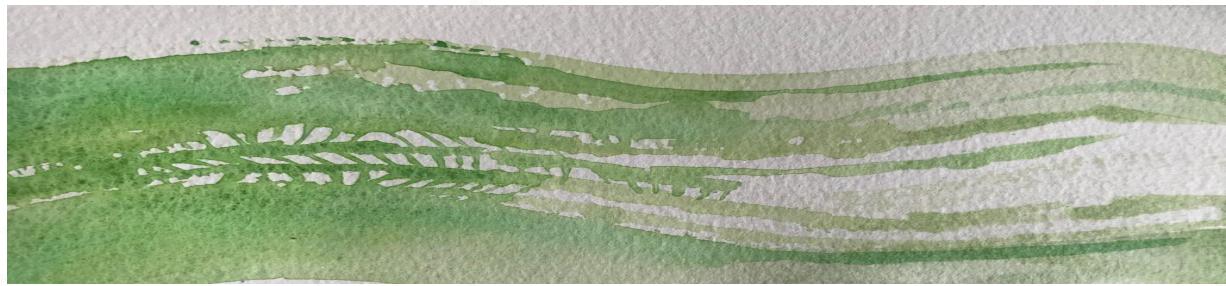
Giving someone drugs and alcohol to "loosen up" their inhibitions

Playing on the fact of a relationship, saying things such as: "Sex is the way to prove your love for me," or "If I don't get sex from you I'll get it somewhere else." Abusers react negatively with sadness, anger, or resentment if a partner says no or doesn't immediately agree to something

Continuing to pressure someone even after they've said no

Making a partner feel worthless, threatened, powerless, or afraid of what might happen if they say no to sexual demands

Trying to normalise their sexual expectations, e.g. "I need it. I'm a man. I have needs"



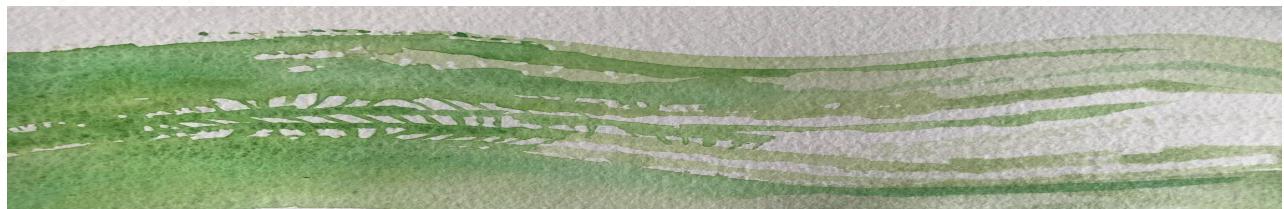
Abuse as a mother: This form of abuse remains hidden and silent. It is a specific pattern of systematic abuse that undermines and diminishes a woman's role as a mother and controls her relationship with her children.

Types of Abuse as a Mother

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|--|--|
| Denial of access to antenatal care | Turning children against mother |
| Use of pregnancy to increase violence | Using children to abuse and act violently towards their mother |
| Threats to harm the children or take them away | Undermining role as a mother |
| Threats to involve Social Services | Not allowed to parent, diminishing role |
| Use of children to control and blackmail | |

Effects of Abuse as a Mother

- | | |
|---|---|
| Fear and worry for self and children's safety | Unable to develop close healthy relationships with children |
| Reluctance to seek help for fear of 'losing' children | Inappropriate dependence on children as a support |
| Feelings of guilt and responsibility for the abuse | Unable to parent in a healthy manner |
| Feeling alone and trapped: unable to leave for fear of taking children away from their father | Feelings of inadequacy and poor self-confidence |
| Fear of 'breaking up the family' | Postnatal depression |



Coercive control is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation, and intimidation, or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten the victim.
(Home Office, 2015)

This controlling behaviour is designed to make a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence, and regulating their everyday behaviour.

- Isolation from friends and family
- Deprivation of basic needs, such as food
- Monitoring of time, spending, location and activities with friends
- Monitoring of partner via online communication tools or spyware
- Taking control over aspects of a partner's everyday life - where they can go, who they can see, what they can wear, and when they can sleep
- Repeatedly putting someone down, such as telling them they're worthless
- Humiliating, degrading or dehumanising
- Making threats or intimidating



Spiritual abuse - "When a spiritual or religious leader, system, or individual attempts to control and/or manipulate another individual using religious text or practices."

Using someone's religious or spiritual beliefs to manipulate, control or shame them eg.'I'm the head of the house and you have to submit to me'

Taking religious texts or beliefs out of context to minimise or rationalise physical, emotional, or financially abusive behaviours, or justify sexual coercive behaviours, assault and or marital rape

Diminishing, ridiculing or insulting someone's religious or spiritual beliefs and values

Preventing someone from practicing their religious or spiritual beliefs



How myths surrounding domestic and sexual abuse perpetuate violence.

The scale of violence and discrimination against women and girls around the globe would not be possible outside of a context of widespread gender inequality.

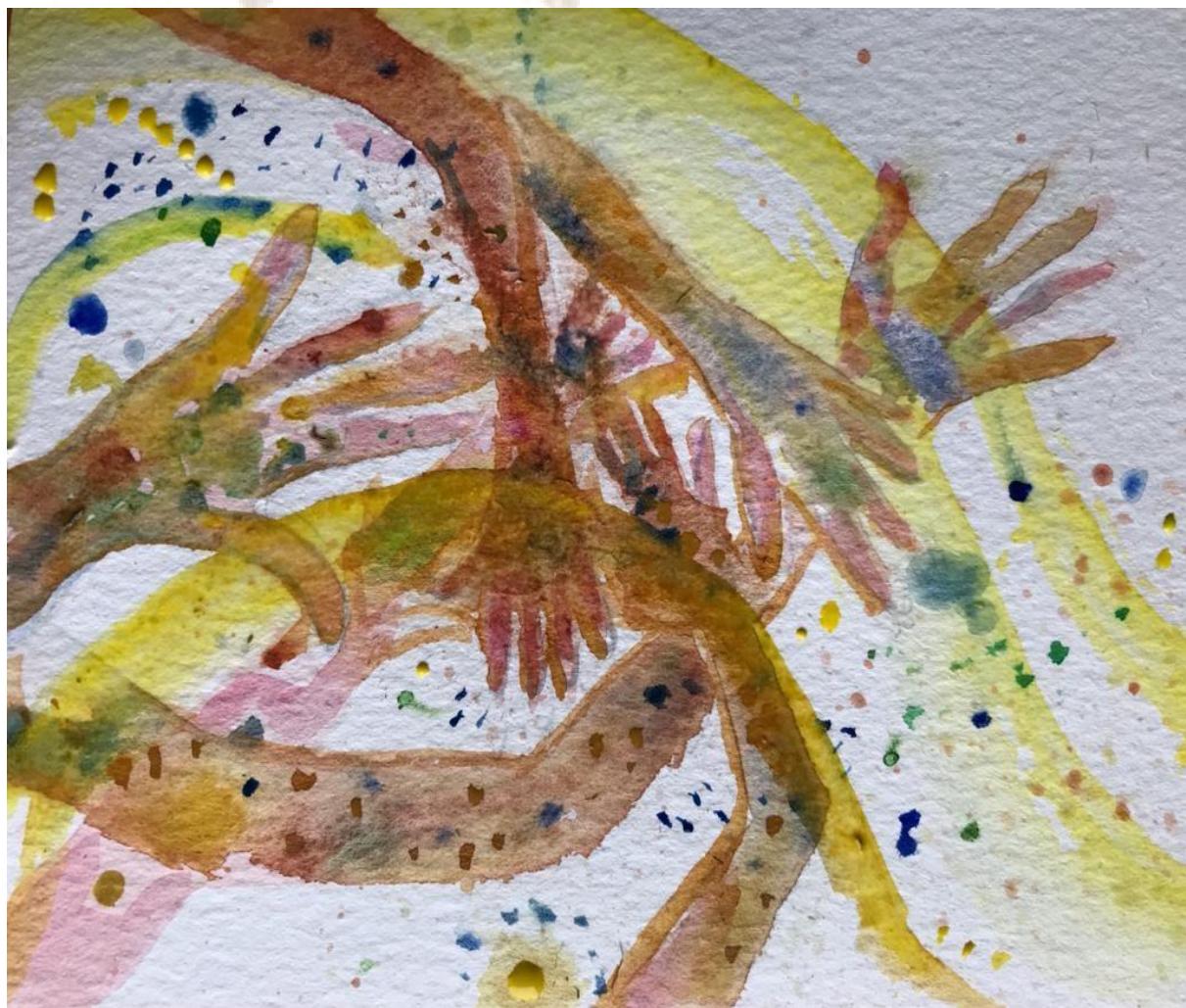
This inequality is enabled by conscious or unconscious values, beliefs, attitudes, and biases that we hold, which often go unacknowledged and unchallenged. These assumptions and unwritten rules (that may 'go without saying' in our societies and faith communities) contribute to the creation and maintenance of cultural 'norms' which determine the value and role of women and enable the perpetuation of violence.

Domestic and sexual violence is also perpetrated by the existence of certain myths that influence our understanding of the nature of abuse and abusers. Such myths can compound the shame and stigma associated with surviving such abuse, and faith communities that accept - or fail to challenge -these myths run the risk of providing impunity for abusers and enabling the continued oppression and abuse of women.

This resource seeks to assist faith communities in exploring and challenging some of the assumptions that are often made about perpetrators and survivors of abuse. And, through the use of the bible studies, we hope to facilitate conversations about some of the attitudes and beliefs that 'go without saying' in our faith communities, thus contributing to the kind of inequality within which discrimination and abuse can be sustained.

Reflection

What myths do we hold that can risk perpetuating and enabling discrimination, inequality, and abuse of women within our personal and professional contexts?



Common myths

Alcohol makes him violent. No - Abusers are also violent when sober. Many men who drink alcohol never use violence against their partners and wives.

Mental health/illness makes him abusive. No - there is no research that supports this myth. The perpetration of abuse and violence is always a choice. Domestic abuse happens throughout every level of society, regardless of health, wealth or status.

He's doing this because he was abused as a child. No - Using violence and abuse is a choice a perpetrator makes; he alone is responsible. It is unrelated to childhood.

She must have done something to provoke him. No - This myth is widespread, deep-rooted and often based on the belief that the man is the head of the family, and that his role is to punish his partner or children if they act in a way he doesn't approve of. This myth is dangerous because any reference to 'provocation' means that we are blaming the victim and relieving the abuser of responsibility for the violence.

It doesn't happen in our church community and only happens in working class families or where there is poverty. No - Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, faith or class.

Domestic violence is a private matter, we shouldn't get involved. No - Domestic abuse is a crime. It is not an individual but a social problem. We all need to speak out against it.

It's caused by weakness/anger management issues. No - Domestic abuse is rarely about losing control, but taking control. Abusive men rarely act spontaneously when angry. They consciously choose when to abuse their partner: when they are alone, and when there are no witnesses (if there is a witness, then usually they are a child). He has control over whom he abuses.

Christian men don't abuse their partners. No - Research reports Christian men can be abusive, and also cause further harm by relying on bible verses or religious language to justify their behaviour (this is classified as spiritual abuse).

If a woman is really experiencing abuse, she will/should just leave. No - There are many barriers to navigating a way to safety, particularly when leaving an abusive and violent relationship or marriage. Research shows that a woman is in most danger when and after she leaves. Up to 75% of homicides occur upon separation and there is an increase of violence for up to 2 years after separation.

Christian wives should 'just forgive and return'. No - The concept of forgiveness is often misapplied in abusive situations. Emphasis is often placed on the

responsibility of the woman to forgive, rather than on the need to hold the perpetrator responsible and accountable for his own behaviour. This endangers women and children's lives.

The concepts of headship and submission entitle a man to treat his wife however he chooses. No- Regardless of an individual's view on gender roles within a home or community, nothing entitles a man to subject his wife to abusive behaviours. Such abuse distorts the image of God in which women and men were created.

'For better for worse, in sickness and in health' means that women should tolerate abuse. No - Some women believe that it is their religious obligation to remain committed to their husbands, even if that means tolerating violence and abuse within a marriage. Religious leaders and communities may reinforce this misconception and we must reassure survivors God does not want anyone to suffer, or remain in violent and abusive situations.

(Explanations and hyperlinks into these)

For reflection

Are there passages from scripture or teachings from the church that could reinforce these myths?

What scripture passages or theological teachings challenge these myths?

This is not just a women's issue, it's a men's issue too. Discuss.

"Theological scholar Walter Brueggemann tells us, 'the first step towards prophetic obedience is the naming of what is wrong: a commitment to truth-telling that overcomes indolence, indifference and vested interest'....The duty of church leaders is to tell the truth, even when what is horrible is found within our own churches. ' (Helen Paynter)

Barriers to leaving abusive and violent relationships

Frequently, people ask, 'if things are that bad, why doesn't she just leave?' or 'why does she stay?' Leaving an abusive and violent relationship is not a straightforward process. There are many barriers to navigating safety, particularly as research shows that a woman is in most danger when and after she leaves. Up to 75% of homicides occur upon separation and there is an increase of violence for up to 2 years after separation.

Barriers to leaving include:

Fear: of not being believed, of threats, of retaliation; of being killed; of the abuser hurting loved ones; of being stalked.

Children: fear for their safety if the abuser has threatened to hurt them if they leave; custody concerns (such as the abuser gaining custody, which still occurs in 50% of cases); child abuse that has occurred as a result of trying to leave in the past.

Isolation: from friends, family, community support and resources, as abusers often attempt to cut survivors off from support networks as a control mechanism. This often includes monitoring of a survivor's texts, emails, and social media accounts.

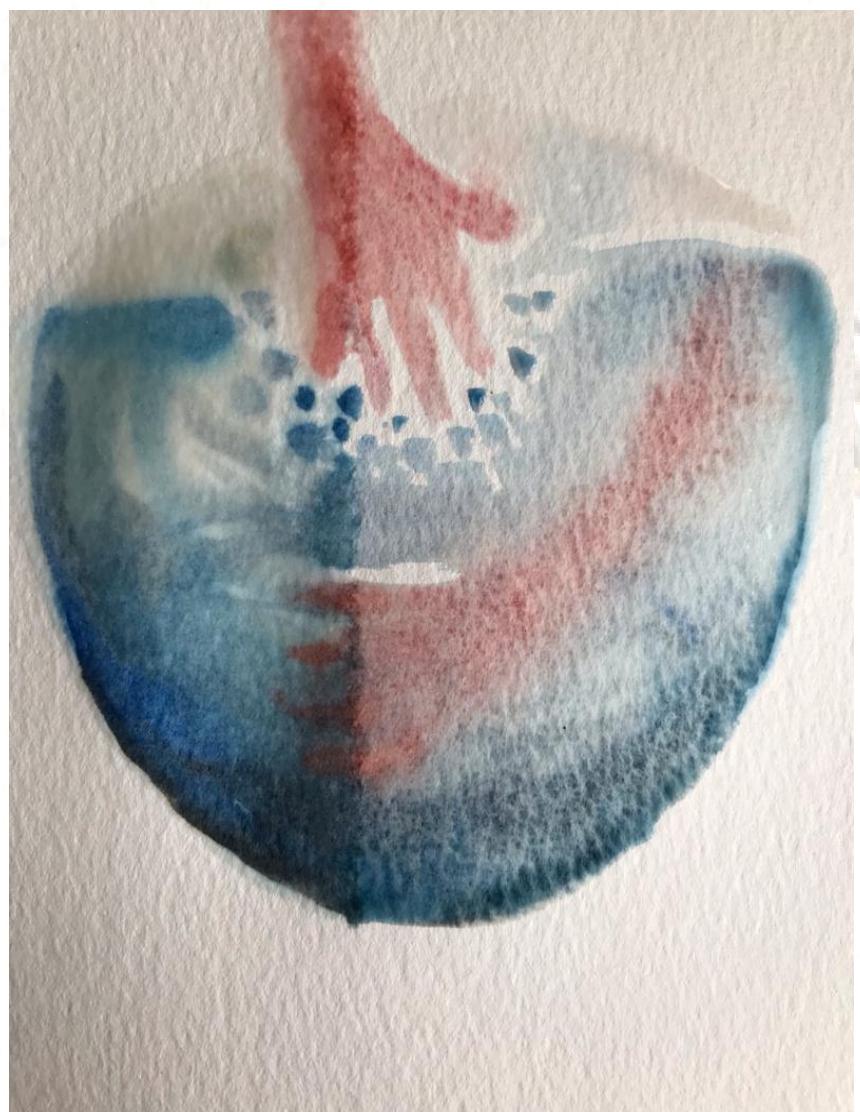
Economic necessity: the abusive partner may control the finances or be the sole source of finances for the family; the abusive partner may have destroyed the survivor's credit. Lack of resources makes it seem impossible to leave.

Homelessness: the abusive partner may threaten to force the survivor and possibly their children out of their living situation; the abusive partner may have full control over the survivor's living situation.

Religious, cultural and/or family pressures to stay together: it is important to note that all cultures have both traditions of resistance to relationship abuse as well as forms of acceptance of it. Culture cannot excuse relationship abuse, though abusers may use 'culture' as a way to justify their choice to abuse. Abuse is not inherent or natural to any culture or group— it is always a choice.

Hope/belief: that a partner will change, often resulting from manipulative tactics by the abuser. This may also be influenced by concern for a partner's wellbeing: fear that the partner will be arrested, imprisoned, deported etc. which may have consequences for retaliation, finances, and children.

Shame, stigma or belief: that the abuse is the woman's fault, largely because of societal myths and victim blaming.



How can faith communities respond?

The relationship between faith, culture, and gender is complex. When responding to issues of domestic violence and abuse, it is important to understand that women can face multiple oppressions in their lives and that depending on their situation women may encounter inequality in different ways. As faith leaders, it is necessary to develop a perspective and expertise that is intersectional.

The concept of intersectionality was first coined in 1989 by academic scholar Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectionality recognises that women's experiences of violence are shaped by multiple factors such as their race, colour, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, marital status, sexual orientation, HIV/AIDS status, migrant or refugee status, age, or disability (Ref: UN Women (2012), "Handbook for National Action Plans on Violence against Women," New York. p. 15). For example, a woman from an ethnic minority community may encounter racism, poverty and be subject to violence or abuse. A disabled woman experiencing violence may face multiple barriers relating to her impairment label when attempting to access support.

By understanding the different situations where violence and abuse are perpetrated and experienced and by acknowledging that individuals have nuanced and intersecting needs, faith leaders can more effectively support women, including those who are marginalised, to disclose abuse with the confidence that they will be understood and believed.

The question to ask is 'why do abusers continue to abuse?' and how can we, as a faith community, establish a support system of safety for women, or women and their children to live lives free from fear, abuse, and violence? Discuss.

Pathways for support

Recognise:

- Understand that domestic abuse and violence do happen in Christian relationships
- Be aware of the signs of power, control, and abuse within intimate relationships and marriages
- Create a culture of zero-tolerance for discrimination and abuse within faith communities

Respond:

- 'I believe you, you are not alone,' is a vital, validating first response, regardless of who the alleged perpetrator may be
- Discussion with a woman, in agreement, about contacting relevant specialist services for further support in relation to any disclosures
- Implement church procedures in relation to adult and child safeguarding policies where relevant, keeping the woman informed throughout the process

Refer:

- Responding to disclosures in partnership
- Contact 24/7 Domestic violence helpline:
Freephone 0800 802 1414 or email help@dsahelpline.org
- Contact specialist support services for advice, guidance, and further support

A prayer of lament

Mother and Father God,

You challenge injustice.

You offer us grace in the face of our brokenness.

We ask you to shine a light,

on the hurt we may have caused,

or the care we have not taken.

Support us.

We have often ignored and misunderstood situations of domestic and sexual violence,

too often we have kept silent,

quiet bystanders,

closing our eyes and ears to the suffering and oppression of others.

We acknowledge with lament,

as faith communities.

Give us the courage not to conform to a culture of silence in the face of oppression and harms.

May our lives reflect your desire for right-relationship with all humanity,

practicing a Gospel of love and compassion.

Amen



Guidance for faith communities responding to disclosures of violence and abuse:

Find a safe place to talk.

If possible, have someone else present- this needs to be acceptable for the woman.

Allow time, be patient, and listen to what is said- take it seriously.

Believe what is being said. Women are frequently told by their abusers that no one will believe them, and what you are hearing will probably only be the tip of the iceberg.

Give priority to immediate safety (and to any children involved).

Empower, support and respect survivors' choices. Even if they choose initially to return to the abuser, it is their choice. Survivors of domestic abuse have the best understanding of how to remain safe. If there are children involved, however, their welfare and safety are paramount.

Give information about relevant support agencies and, if appropriate, offer to contact an agency on a survivor's behalf (and in their presence), or offer a safe and private place from which they can contact the relevant agency.

Use the expertise of those who are properly trained- refer in partnership to specialist support services. There are a number of organisations listed within this resource that can and will support.

Give reassurance that what the abuser has done is wrong, completely unacceptable, and NOT 'God's will'.

Always protect a survivor's confidentiality. If required to keep any information and records, do so, and keep them in a secure place in accordance with organisational GDPR policy and procedures.

"I am the God, who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth, for in this I delight." Jeremiah 9:24

When responding to disclosures of violence and abuse:

Do not make personal judgments about what is being disclosed, or question why the survivor did not act in a certain way.

Refrain from making unrealistic promises.

Don't suggest that she should 'try again'; evidence shows that survivors experience up to 35 incidents before seeking help.

Never minimise the severity of the experience or the danger someone is in.

Don't react with disbelief, disgust, or anger at what is disclosed, or react passively.

Never blame a survivor for a perpetrator's violence.

Never act on the person's behalf without their consent and/or knowledge (unless the welfare of any children involved is paramount).

Don't expect someone to make decisions quickly, and never make decisions for them, or tell them what to do.

Don't recommend couples counseling/ family mediation/marriage courses/healthy relationships courses. This can be dangerous in domestic abuse situations. Always support access to specialist support services.

Don't encourage victims to 'forgive the abuser' and take them back.

Don't send a woman home with a prayer, direct her to submit to her husband, or instruct her to bring him to church to be saved in order to be a 'better Christian wife'. This could endanger a woman and her children.

Refrain from contacting someone at home unless there has been prior agreement. Never approach the abusive partner for their side of the story- this can endanger a survivor of DSV.

Don't give information about the survivor's whereabouts to the abuser or to others who may inadvertently/unintentionally pass information on to the abuser.

Don't encourage someone to be dependent on you (or others within the church community), or become overly involved; this can be problematic and disempower someone who has already been diminished and rendered powerless. Always support access to specialist support services.

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Maya Angelou



Useful Resources:

Domestic and sexual abuse: Legal remedies at a glance:

<https://belfastdvp.co.uk/themainevent/wp-content/uploads/Final-at-a-glance-19.pdf>

Financial abuse guidance at a glance:

<https://belfastdvp.co.uk/themainevent/wp-content/uploads/Updated-2019-guidance-booklet.pdf>

Safety planning when self-isolating:

https://belfastdvp.co.uk/themainevent/wp-content/uploads/Self-Isolation-Safety-Plan_PDF-2.pdf

Domestic Abuse and Women with No Recourse to Public Funds: Where Human Rights Do Not Reach:

<https://belfastdvp.co.uk/themainevent/wp-content/uploads/Thesis-undertaken-by-Rebecca-Dudley-Executive-Summary.pdf> bvc6xqa \XVA
|zXCVFBGHFDSAasdfsAASDFGHTREWAsdsA

Women, disabilities and abuse -

<http://stoprelationshipabuse.org/educated/types-of-abuse/women-with-disabilities/>

<https://womens-aid.org.uk/how-can-churches-be-responsive-to-domestic-abuse/>

Useful tools:

The Duluth Power and Control model:

Power, control and equity within heterosexual relationships:

<https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/PowerandControl.pdf>

<https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Equality.pdf>

Power, Control and equity within LGBTQI relationships:

<https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Power-and-Control-Thorne-Harbour-Health.pdf>

<http://stoprelationshipabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/LGBT-Power-and-Control-Wheel.pdf>

<https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/pubs/forge/index.html>

<https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Equity-and-Accountability-Thorne-Harbour-Health.pdf>

Resource on sexual consent - Tea Consent (Clean) - YouTube

Useful contacts numbers: Northern Ireland

If you are in immediate danger **contact Police Service Northern Ireland - 999**

Freephone 24hr Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline: (managed by Nexus NI)

The Helpline is open to anyone affected by domestic & sexual violence regardless of gender, sexuality, disability, age or ethnicity.

Contact : 0800 802 1414 or email help@dsahelpline.org

Local Women's Aid Groups: Northern Ireland Women's Aid contacts – details of Women's Aid local groups are found by clicking on this link.

The Rainbow Project (LGBTQIA+ support services) – Contact 028 9031 9030
<https://www.rainbow-project.org/experiencing-abuse/>

Men's Advisory Project: For men seeking support you can contact the Men's Advisory Project. Support and counselling services for men experiencing domestic abuse. Contact – 028 9024 1929

Victim Support NI – helps people affected by any type of crime. They provide emotional support, information and practical help to victims, witnesses and others affected by crime. <https://www.victimsupportni.com/about-us/contact-us/>

NEXUS: Northern Ireland's leading charity in supporting people affected by sexual trauma. Contact: info@nexusni.org 02890326803

The Rowan centre (Sexual assault referral centre): a range of support and services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to children, young people, women and men who have been sexually abused, assaulted or raped, whether this happened in the past or more recently. Contact: 0800 389 4424 <http://therowannet>

Childline – 0800 1111 <https://www.childline.org.uk>

Useful contacts: Republic Ireland

If you are in immediate danger contact: **An Garda Siochana on 112/999**

Safe Ireland Regional and County Services: There are 38 domestic abuse services located in towns across Ireland. Services are free, confidential and available to all women. Find contact details for regional and county services here:

<https://www.safeireland.ie/get-help/where-to-find-help/>

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre : The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre offer a free, national 24-hour helpline on **1800 77 88 88** for anyone who has experienced sexual assault, rape or childhood sexual abuse.

An Garda Siochana: Anyone who may wish to report or discuss an incident of Domestic or Sexual Violence can contact **112/999** or their local Garda Station or for child abuse incidents contact the 24hr dedicated phone line for the reporting of child sexual abuse. The phone line number is **1800 555 222**. This confidential free-phone line is manned on a 24-hour basis, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Men's Aid: provides information and advice to men experiencing domestic abuse in Ireland. Their services include a national confidential helpline, legal information and advice, and counselling, among others.

You can contact their national helpline at **(01) 554 3811** or email hello@mensaid.ie

The Male Advice Line: The Male Advice Line is managed by the Men's Development Network and offers confidential advice and support to male victims of domestic violence and abuse over the phone. Telephone: **1800 816 588**

Boots Pharmacies: Boots Pharmacies now offer a "Safe Space" for people experiencing domestic violence. In this confidential space, people can contact one of the 39 frontline specialist domestic abuse services across the country and access free, confidential support and advice.

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- [4] World Health Organisation (WHO)
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>
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- [7] Id. 4
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<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/launch/english/v.a.w-exeE-use.pdf>

