



Alcohol and domestic, sexual & gender-based violence

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Contents

- Summary **3**
- About us **6**
- Introduction **7**
- Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV) **9**
- Alcohol and crime **11**
- Alcohol and DSGBV **12**
- Children’s issues **15**
- Heavy alcohol use and DSGBV **17**
- Women’s alcohol use **19**
- Recommendations **20**

Summary

“Ignoring the presence of alcohol will neither eliminate its role in intimate partner violence nor prevent its being used as an excuse for violence. On the contrary, the more we know about how alcohol affects violence, including intimate partner violence, the better able we will be to develop effective prevention strategies and treatment responses.”

Many studies have demonstrated significant, and positive, associations between alcohol consumption and rates of criminal violence, and we can say with some confidence that more drinking tends to result in more violence, and less drinking tends to result in less violence.

Alcohol and crime have a closely interconnected relationship, with alcohol consumption being a contributing factor to crime and antisocial behaviour. Alcohol plays a key role in crimes such as public order offences, assault and murder, however, alcohol also plays a significant role in the crimes of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV). Indeed, reducing alcohol use is recognised by the World Health Organization (WHO) as an important strategy for reducing violence against women as well as rape and sexual assault.

Therefore, reducing alcohol consumption and reducing alcohol-related violence should be key goals of government, which is especially true in relation to domestic violence and gender-based violence.

Key facts

- The 2022 Sexual Violence Survey found that 40% of adults have experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.
- Research by Women's Aid found that 1 in 5 young women and 1 in 11 young men have experienced intimate partner abuse.
- A two-hour reduction in late-night trading hours in New South Wales, Australia, was found to reduce reports of domestic violence by 29%.
- An extension of licencing hours in Northern Ireland has led to a 17% increase in alcohol-related crime.
- Studies from Australia found that alcohol is involved in about 30-40% of both intimate partner and family violence.
- National research on domestic abuse in intimate partner relationships found that alcohol was a trigger for abusive behaviour in 34% of cases.
- Past national research found that alcohol was a factor in up to 70% of cases of domestic violence against women.
- Research examining the presence of both child maltreatment and intimate partner violence found that they occurred during the same period in 45%–70% of studies.
- According to the Saol Project report, 'In Plain Sight', at least 11,000 women in Ireland struggling with addiction are also experiencing domestic violence, with almost 50,000 having endured these simultaneously at some stage in their lives.

Recommendations for government

- Reduce whole-of-population alcohol consumption, through controls on pricing, marketing and availability, as a strategy for reducing violence against women – as recommended by the WHO.
- Challenge social norms that trivialise men’s harmful drinking and behaviours.
- Implement gender-informed alcohol policy changes that reduce men’s problematic drinking patterns.
- Adopt clear primary objectives in relation to alcohol regulation and licencing to prevent DSGBV, alongside existing objectives around alcohol harm reduction.
- Deliver evidence-based reforms to address availability and access, including regulations on licenced premises density, operating hours, online sales, and advertising.
- Ensure close co-ordination across multiple agencies in relation to services such as addiction, child and family services, domestic and sexual violence supports.
- Work with Cuan, the Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV) Agency, and other organisations, on a framework to ensure the development of an integrated and focused effort to address the role of alcohol in DSGBV.
- Improved data collection in relation to DSGBV, including recording if the perpetrator used alcohol prior to the crime.
- Implement ‘[Operation Encompass](#)’, a police-led, school-based early intervention safeguarding scheme to support children and young people who experience domestic abuse, across all schools in Ireland.
- Ensure training for youth workers and those working in early years services regarding alcohol and DSGBV.
- Secure the rollout of gender specific DSGBV services.

About us

Alcohol Action Ireland (AAI) was established in 2003 and is the national independent advocate for reducing alcohol harm. We campaign for the burden of alcohol harm to be lifted from the individual, community and State, and have a strong track record in campaigning, advocacy, research and information provision.

Our work involves providing information on alcohol-related issues, creating awareness of alcohol-related harm and offering policy solutions with the potential to reduce that harm, with a particular emphasis on the implementation of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018. Our overarching goal is to achieve a reduction in consumption of alcohol and the consequent health and social harms which alcohol causes in society.

Alcohol Action Ireland directors:

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Introduction

Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue in Irish society, impacting women, men and children in diverse and devastating ways".[1] DSGBV is not solely an issue for those directly affected – it is an insidious, society-wide problem that touches every community, every workplace and every home in Ireland.[2] These crimes are a blight on society and encompass different forms of physical, sexual and psychological abuse.

Recent findings from the 2022 Sexual Violence Survey, published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), found that 40% of adults have experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime, with women disproportionately affected at 52% compared to 28% of men. Younger women, particularly those aged 18-24, reported even higher rates, with 65% having experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. Furthermore, in Ireland, one in four women who have been in a relationship have been abused by a current or former partner.[3] A 2014 EU-wide study by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) reported that 26% of women in Ireland have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since age 15, and 41% of Irish women know someone in their circle of family or friends who have experienced intimate partner violence.[4]



The nurse seems taken aback.
‘Why do you bite your nails like that?’
Oh my God, I think, this is my chance. Please,
please ask me more about it and I’ll tell you.
I’m dying to tell her everything but all that
comes out of my mouth is ‘Ah it’s me nerves.’

Aisling Creegan – author of I Am Someone

The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence stated that 29% of women in Ireland have been affected by domestic abuse.[5] Data from Courts Services from 2019 shows that 23,500 applications were received under Domestic Violence legislation, while more recent research conducted by Women’s Aid, on young women and men in Ireland, found that 1 in 5 young women and 1 in 11 young men have experienced intimate partner abuse.[6]

In most EU Member States, until relatively recently, violence against women – particularly domestic violence – was considered a private matter in which the state played only a limited role.[7] This is especially true of Ireland where marital rape only became a crime under section 5 of the Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act 1990, which abolished ‘any rule of law by virtue of which a husband cannot be guilty of the rape of his wife’.[8] However, since the 1990s DSGBV has emerged as a fundamental human rights concern that warrants legal and political recognition at the highest level, and as an area where the State has an obligation to safeguard victims.[9]

While the last two decades have seen an increased focus on DSGBV, the reality is much more work is needed to eradicate this human rights abuse. Central to this work is the need to investigate the factors which are drivers of domestic and gender-based violence. Alcohol Action Ireland considers it has an important contribution to make to the national debate on eradicating DSGBV. Therefore, this policy paper will look at the role of a known driver of domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence – alcohol.



I witnessed violence, actual and threatened. I experienced unnecessary poverty and guilt. I developed a shell but it has often cracked. This past has brought me into places and conflicts and has made me hyper vigilant and hyper sensitive.

Brendan – Shared Voices contributor

It is informed by the work of AAI's initiative, Silent Voices, which raises awareness and puts forward policy solutions in relation to parental problem alcohol use (PPAU). Its work includes contributions to Shared Voices - an online platform where adults who have experienced this very hidden alcohol harm share their experiences.

Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence

Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence can happen to anyone, and it can take many forms – psychological/emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and physical abuse.[10] For instance, in 2023, Men's Aid had 8,682 contacts to their domestic violence support service with victims ranging in ages from 18 to 90+ years across the country.[11] In their annual report, the charity outlined how on average victims contacted their support service four times.

However, the reality is that DSGBV in Ireland is overwhelmingly perpetrated against women and against children.

Shockingly, 2023 was a record-breaking year for all the wrong reasons with Women's Aid recording the highest level of disclosures of domestic abuse in its 50-year history. According to their annual report there were 28,638 contacts through frontline services detailing 40,048 disclosures of abuse – an 18% increase on the previous year. The disclosures to Women's Aid included 35,570 reports of domestic abuse against women and 4,478 reports of abuse of children.[12]



I kept telling everyone that what I needed was to get out of there but there was nothing anyone could do. I took a long time for that to sink in. The services had completely missed me.

Jack – Shared Voices contributor

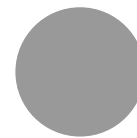
The CSO Sexual Violence Survey 2022 also made for grim reading. The survey outlined how four in ten adults in Ireland have experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime, with 26% of adults having experienced sexual violence as an adult and 29% as a child. Again, as with domestic violence, women experience higher levels of sexual violence in their lifetime than men, with women almost four times more likely to have experienced sexual violence.[13] Since early 2015, the number of recorded sexual offences in Ireland has been increasing.[14] In 2023, the number of reported sexual offences was 2,884.[15]

Furthermore, since 2020, 41 women have been violently killed in Ireland, with 25 more women killed in Northern Ireland over the same period.[16] [17] Shockingly, it remains the case that the most dangerous place for women is their own home as the nightmare of violence and abuse most commonly will be at the hands of a current or former intimate male partner.[18] Indeed, recent research led by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) found domestic femicides accounted for 74% of cases in Ireland between 2012–2023.[19]



“I grew up with two alcoholic parents in a very dysfunctional household that was extremely violent. Police calling to our home at weekends, ambulances taking my mother away after my father had split her head open again against the fireplace whilst I stood behind him begging him to stop...”

Miriam– Shared Voices contributor



Alcohol and crime

Alcohol and crime have a closely interconnected relationship, with alcohol consumption being a contributing factor to crime and antisocial behaviour. Alcohol plays a key role in crimes such as public order offences, domestic violence, assault and murder, as well as rape and sexual assault.[20] Many studies have demonstrated significant, and positive, associations between alcohol consumption and rates of criminal violence, and we can say with some confidence that more drinking tends to result in more violence, and less drinking tends to result in less violence.[21]

While alcohol use is neither necessary nor sufficient for violence to occur, research consistently shows a positive relationship between alcohol and violence, therefore, addressing alcohol use could reduce the frequency and severity of violence in the home and interrupt intergenerational cycles of abuse.[22]

Given the relationship between alcohol and violence, it is clear that alcohol reduction strategies are a significant defence against alcohol-related violence. If we reduce alcohol consumption through controls on price, marketing and availability, there should be a corresponding reduction in alcohol-related violence. However, addressing alcohol use remains an underutilised strategy in the violence prevention field; indeed, relatively few prevention efforts intentionally address alcohol use or draw on effective strategies from the alcohol field.[23] Therefore, reducing alcohol consumption and reducing alcohol-related violence should be key goals of government, which is especially true in relation to domestic violence and gender-based violence.



I was always afraid. My brain couldn't learn about school stuff because it was hardwired for survival. Homework was the last thing on my mind. However, the teachers didn't know that and, as a result, became a further source of fear when I attempted to hide my lack of homework from them.

Jack – Shared Voices contributor

Alcohol and DSGBV

“Ask any woman if she would cross the street to avoid a drunk and aggressive man, and the answer would be unequivocally yes. But when women are at risk in their own homes, they don’t have the luxury of walking away, and they’re often told the threat is not real.”[24]

The consistent link between alcohol and domestic and gender-based violence has led to the recognition of alcohol as a “risk factor” for intimate partner violence by the World Health Organisation.[25] However, there has been relatively little research examining how alcohol affects violence, at least in part because of concerns that such research would be used to justify the use of alcohol as an excuse for violence against women.[26]

Alcohol is not, and never will be, an excuse or explanation for domestic violence. However, it is a known driver of domestic violence. Indeed, as noted by Dr Eoin Fogarty, Consultant in Emergency Medicine, Cork University Hospital, “I frequently attend to victims of domestic abuse, and a key factor frequently present is alcohol, resulting in severe physical and psychological trauma to all parties, including children.”[27]

“ I frequently attend to victims of domestic abuse, and a key factor frequently present is alcohol, resulting in severe physical and psychological trauma to all parties, including children”

Dr Eoin Fogarty
Consultant in Emergency Medicine
Cork University Hospital

Research continuously identifies alcohol use as one of the most consistent risk factors for domestic violence and violence against children.[28] Indeed, alcohol has long been known to increase both the incidence and severity of physical and sexual violence within intimate relationships and families.[29] International research also shows that the accessibility and availability of alcohol is closely linked to violence, the more alcohol outlets there are and the later they trade, the more violence we see, and vice versa.

For example, a two-hour reduction in late-night trading hours in New South Wales, Australia, in the late 2000s was found to reduce reports of domestic violence by 29%. Unfortunately, the inverse was also proven when the New South Wales Government decided to extend alcohol sales by one hour in 2016, and a significant increase in family violence assaults was experienced.[30] Meanwhile in Northern Ireland, the extension of licencing hours in October 2021 has led to a 17% increase in alcohol-related crime.[31]

Alcohol-related crimes that take place in the home, particularly those associated with domestic abuse, can often go unreported to An Garda Síochána. However, we know from research that

a “higher density of alcohol retailers is associated with greater incidences of violence, assault, and domestic violence”. [32] Indeed, international research shows that density is “positively associated with rates of assault hospital admissions”. [33] In Ireland, 73% of the population live within 300 metres of a licenced premises, with the number of off-licences increasing by 95% from 2003 to 2021. [34] This, coupled with low off-trade prices, [35] means Ireland has a growing trend in home drinking, with close to 50% of all alcohol bought in Ireland now purchased from the off trade. [36]



My mother was a violent alcoholic. She beat me for reasons best known to herself. I told her that I loved her in the hope that this would defuse her rage but it never did. Unfortunately, my father did not act as a buffer and was too overwhelmed himself to think about protecting me.

Debbie – Shared Voices contributor

Alcohol can never be used as excuse for criminality, and this is especially true with incidents of domestic and gender-based violence. Research shows that, in incidences of domestic abuse, it appears the role of alcohol is one of a facilitative nature, a contributing cause. [37] Studies from Australia found that alcohol is involved in about 30-40% of both intimate partner and family violence. Similarly, national research on domestic abuse in intimate partner relationships found that alcohol was a trigger for abusive behaviour in 34% of cases. [38] In addition, past research

found that alcohol was a factor in up to 70% of cases of domestic violence against women. [39]

Alcohol is never an excuse or an explanation for rape or sexual assault. Yet, alcohol consumption is sometimes disgracefully used to blame victims or to diminish the responsibility of perpetrators. It must be unequivocally stated that sexual violence is never the victim's fault, and therefore the responsibility for assault always lies with the perpetrator, under any circumstances.[40] Nevertheless, alcohol is consistently found in a high proportion of those who perpetrate sexual assault.[41] The Rape Crisis Network Ireland has said that alcohol is the most common drug used in sexual assaults. The Rape and Justice in Ireland Report found that 76% of all rape defendants had been drinking at the time of the alleged offence.[42]

Despite the known role of alcohol as a driver of DSGBV, a 'Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches' in Australia which looked at actions to end domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) found that "a failure to consider DFSV in alcohol policy has allowed unprecedented growth in alcohol availability, both in the density of liquor outlets and the length of online delivery hours".[43] The Review recommended that alcohol legislation be examined and strengthened. As a result, in September 2024 the national government in Australia agreed to carry out such an examination.[44]

Alongside this, the South Australia government introduced draft legislation in December 2024 which includes clear primary objectives to prevent gendered violence and to restrict alcohol sales and delivery timeframes. The bill is the first of its kind in Australia, and affirms the South Australian government's commitment to reduce gendered violence through alcohol law reform. [45] Such action is in keeping with the developing international frameworks, which guide the global agendas around violence against women and children, and which now recognise reducing harmful alcohol use as an important prevention strategy.[46]



I grew up in a household with two chronic alcoholics. Both were violent when drinking. I would cycle to a local hilly area to dump countless vodka bottles because if daddy found them it would be a reason to beat her.

Alison – Shared Voices contributor

Children's issues

Children are often the unseen victims of domestic abuse. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights survey on violence against women found that 73 % of women who have been victims of violent incidents by their previous or current partner indicate that children living with them were aware of the violence.[47] It is well recognised that children's exposure to domestic violence is a serious Adverse Childhood Experience and that such children are victims in their own right.

One third of children in Ireland have at least one parent who regularly binge drinks or is dependent on alcohol.[48] Harmful alcohol use by a parent or caregiver has been shown to have a range of detrimental consequences for children, including negative health, educational, and social outcomes.[49] Furthermore, given the close connection between alcohol and domestic violence it is likely that hundreds of thousands of children are living in homes with alcohol fuelled violence.



I walk with a ball of shame tied to my foot still to this day. My father was a verbally and sexually abusive alcoholic who got worse as he deteriorated over the years into chronic alcoholism.

Wendy – Shared Voices contributor

Alcohol use is implicated in an increased risk of child maltreatment, including physical or sexual abuse and neglect.[50] Indeed, a review of studies examining the presence of both child maltreatment and intimate partner violence found that they occurred during the same period in 45%–70% of studies.[51] Children may experience domestic violence directly, but children who witness domestic violence may also be significantly affected. Findings from several reviews show that witnessing intimate partner violence can also negatively affect the development of children.[52]

For example, one meta-analysis concluded that “children's exposure to domestic violence is significantly correlated with child problems in the areas of social, emotional, behavioural, cognitive and general health functioning.”[53] Indeed, children in such circumstances may experience

emotional and psychological harm, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.[54] In some cases, this trauma can last well into adulthood.[55] Unfortunately, “some research has also shown that boys who were exposed to domestic violence in their childhood homes are more likely to engage in domestic violence as adults, and girls who have been exposed to domestic violence as children are more likely to be victims of domestic violence in their adult lives”.[56]

Despite the existing scholarship on alcohol and its accelerating role in DSGBV, many health professionals do not make the connection between parental problem alcohol use (PPAU) and possible physical and psychological abuse of children in the home. A study carried out by University College Cork (UCC) and AAI

found that 70% of mental health professionals receive no training on problem alcohol use in the home despite the serious psychological impacts on children and adolescents.[57] Too often children are only considered once a parent presents with an alcohol problem or is in treatment. The reality is that children need services and supports independently of whether a parent is in treatment or not. Not acting is

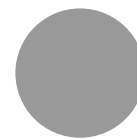
unconscionable as early interventions and support are essential to offset trauma and lifelong harm. Key in this is that all professionals – from teachers to mental health professionals, understand the impact of PPAU and have the resources to support children and families at a whole of population level, not just if there are child welfare concerns.[58]

In recent years the HSE/Tusla Hidden Harm statement and framework agreement has sought to shine a light on PPAU and its impact on parenting ability. However, this framework requires urgency and momentum, and it is important that there is enhanced, combined efforts by Tusla and HSE Addiction Services to build greater capacity around reducing harm to children through the Hidden Harm project. An updated action plan must be developed with clear targets, timeframes and funding and be publicly available and promoted.



I could hear screaming in the kitchen, lots of bangs. I don't know what happened in the kitchen, and I don't ever plan on finding out. All I know is that I brought my little brother into my room, called my nanny, and refused to open the door until she got to the house. That was one of the worst nights I've ever had.

Jenny – Shared Voices contributor



Heavy alcohol use and DSGBV

Alcohol is no ordinary commodity; it is a depressant drug with significant health implications for those who use it. A psychotropic depressant of the central nervous system, alcohol promotes simultaneous changes in several neuronal pathways, such as numbing the frontal cortex of the brain – the part of the brain responsible for the interpretation, expression and regulation of emotion.[59] Therefore, alcohol consumption exerts a profound neurological impact that leads to various behavioural and biological alterations.[60] Common effects of alcohol on personality include mood alterations, impaired judgment, personality exaggeration such as emotional volatility and aggression, and in alcohol blackout cases, memory impairment.[61]

Ireland has high levels of particularly risky drinking patterns such as heavy episodic drinking (consuming six or more standard drinks on a drinking occasion.) The HRB 2021 Drug and Alcohol Survey found that more than one-half (51.1%) of all drinkers in Ireland were classified as hazardous drinkers using the WHO's AUDIT-C tool while nearly 15% of the population are classified as having an Alcohol Use Disorder.[62]

With such levels of use, the individual may depress higher order executive functioning that supports the inhibition of normative aggressive impulses, efficient social information processing, and decision making.[63] Resultantly, some researchers identify heavy, acute alcohol consumption as a contributing cause of male-to-female violence and aggression.[64] A meta-analytic review by Crane et al. suggests that male participants who consume alcohol are significantly more aggressive toward females than those who do not.[65] In such instances alcohol has a proximal effect, that is, alcohol use is directly linked to DSGBV due to its psychopharmacological effects.[66]



I often spent nights sleeping rough in the Phoenix Park in the long grass when I was fifteen. Ironically, I would try to sleep close to where the prostitutes and their punters hung out, as I felt safer there than in my own home.

Aisling Creegan – author of I Am Someone

Furthermore, where there is an alcohol-dependent individual within an intimate relationship, or family unit, the cycle of abuse often follows a repetitive and destructive pattern that can keep victims trapped in violent relationships.[67] [68] [69] Indeed, alcohol addiction often intensifies this cycle by reducing self-control, impairing judgment, and increasing aggression.[70] Where there is heavy alcohol use, this can often cause absenteeism, job loss, and financial instability, further increasing stress, tension, and the possibility of abuse.[71]

Moreover, such situations can also create financial dependence which keeps the victim trapped in an abusive relationship. Therefore, it is paramount that services and supports are there for victims, such as professional help, legal protections, and financial supports.

It is also important that in treatment services issues around domestic violence are directly addressed for both male and female perpetrators.



I told my closest friends about the middle of the night altercations between my parents, of my poor mother packing us all into a car and taking off in the middle of the night, of the social workers, of his quick wit when he was sober and his cruelty when he was drunk, about how generous he was when he was making up for something and how he'd take the bite out of our mouths for a drink when he wasn't.

Grace – Shared Voices contributor

Women's alcohol use

There is a significant issue in relation to substance use by victims, often in response to the trauma of their situation. There is a growing body of research showing that women who use substances have often suffered multiple traumas throughout their lives, often stemming in childhood and leading to re-victimisation in adulthood through domestic abuse.[72] Therefore, women who experience domestic abuse are also at much greater risk for alcohol and other substance use problems, because of the trauma they have suffered.

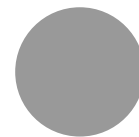
According to the Saol Project report 'In Plain Sight'[73], at least 11,000 women in Ireland struggling with addiction are also experiencing domestic violence, with almost 50,000 having endured these simultaneously at some stage in their lives. The authors of this report wrote: "Women who endure violence in their homes and who use substances are unseen". This points again to the need for a multi-sectoral approach to alcohol issues.

Furthermore, while street violence may come up for discussion in many alcohol support groups, domestic violence is rarely mentioned. It is important that there is space for such matters to be discussed in support groups as these spaces can be vital in providing help for people who are living with someone in active addiction to report domestic violence.



I lived in fear most of my early childhood. Dad could be violent when he drank. I have two younger siblings. I would tell them that everything was going to be ok, while downstairs dad was beating our mum. He instilled fear, insecurity, and anxiety in me from a young age. This has taken many years to overcome even though we have a good relationship now.

Ian – Shared Voices contributor



Recommendations

Given that alcohol is a risk factor for DSGBV, it is important that there is a whole-of-government approach to alcohol in Ireland. As Graham et. al. stated in their paper, 'Alcohol May Not Cause Partner Violence But It Seems to Make It Worse: A Cross National Comparison of the Relationship Between Alcohol and Severity of Partner Violence': "Ignoring the presence of alcohol will neither eliminate its role in intimate partner violence nor prevent its being used as an excuse for violence. On the contrary, the more we know about how alcohol affects violence, including intimate partner violence, the better able we will be to develop effective prevention strategies and treatment responses." [74]

In the US, the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) classifies domestic abuse as a serious public health problem. [75] An excellent technical package brings together an evidence-based set of prevention strategies "with the greatest potential to prevent intimate partner violence (IPV) and its consequences across the lifespan." [76] It cites alcohol 29 times in respect of prevention work, for example: Modifying the physical and social environments of neighbourhoods as research shows that alcohol outlet density, defined as the number of locations where alcohol can be purchased, has been consistently linked to higher rates of IPV.



I was sexually trafficked in my own home from the age of ten. I've been lucky over the years, having gone to such well trained counsellors/psychotherapists who enquired tactfully if my mother would have been aware of the constant flow of men going in to my bedroom at night. I always said; 'No', but I was in deep denial, as subconsciously, I wouldn't accept the fact that a mother who carried me in her womb for nine months could hand me over to paedophiles. I had my first counselling experience at 14. I'm now 54 and have only recently accepted that truth. Being gently held by good counsellors, sowed that seed of reality.

Aisling Creegan – author of I Am Someone

It highlights intervention services that may include counselling, health promotion, patient education resources, referrals to community services

and other supports tailored to specific risks and preventative measures like healthy relationship programmes for couples. It doesn't shy away from the presence of alcohol in sexual violence that occurs at night and states that research focused on engaging bystanders has shown that efforts to increase bystander efficacy are beneficial in alcohol and drug use reduction. It also references alcohol in respect of disrupting the developmental pathways toward partner violence, for example through proven family therapy interventions for at-risk young people who may go on to be perpetrators themselves.

Reducing alcohol use is recognised by the World Health Organization as an important strategy for reducing violence against women.[77]

This includes approaches such as challenging social norms that trivialise men's harmful drinking and behaviours, and advocating for gender-informed alcohol policy changes that reduce men's problematic drinking patterns, create safer drinking environments and cultures for women and men, and prohibit advertising that reinforces gender inequity and masculine heavy drinking cultures.[78] Alongside these there is a need to reduce whole-of-population alcohol consumption using the World Health Organisation's 'best buys' – controls on pricing, marketing and availability.



I was overwhelmed with fear especially at bank holiday weekends with a longer drinking period when my father & his drinking cronies on a late return home would awaken us heightening their pitch to a point of terror due to some drunken disagreement with violence erupting. I still recall jumping out of my bed, running to the kitchen to try to stop this senseless violence but especially to protect my mother.

Shared Voices contributor

AAI believe government must adopt clear primary objectives in relation to alcohol regulation and licencing to prevent DSGBV, alongside existing objectives around alcohol harm reduction. This should be accompanied by evidence-based reforms to address availability and access, including regulations on licenced premises density, operating hours, online sales, and advertising. In addition, there must be close co-ordination across multiple agencies in relation to services such as addiction, child and family services, domestic and sexual violence supports.

There is also a need for a variety of gender specific DSGBV services. Services such as 'MOVE – Men Overcoming Violence' are incredibly important. MOVE works in the area of domestic violence, with a primary aim of supporting the safety and wellbeing of women and their children who are experiencing, or have experienced, violence/abuse in an intimate relationship.[79] It does this by facilitating men in a weekly group process that involves them taking responsibility for their violence and changing their attitude and behaviour.[80] However, there needs to be comparable services available for women who have engaged in domestic violence.

AAI believe that government must work with Cuan, the Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency, and other organisations on a framework to ensure the development of an integrated and focused effort to address the role of alcohol in DSGBV. There is also a need for improved data collection in relation to DSGBV, including recording if the perpetrator used alcohol prior to the crime.

Finally, AAI wishes to see the implementation of 'Operation Encompass' across all schools in Ireland.[81] Operation Encompass is established in police forces in England and Wales and in 2023 was introduced in Northern Ireland. It is a police-led, school-based early intervention safeguarding scheme to support children and young people who experience domestic abuse, much of which is alcohol fuelled.[82]

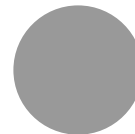
Operation Encompass was created to ensure that by the start of the next school day a child's school will be informed that there has been a police attended incident of domestic abuse incident at the home of the child.[83] This knowledge, given to the school's trained Key Adult, allows the provision of immediate early intervention through overt or silent support, dependent upon the needs and wishes of the child.[85] In the first year of its operation in Northern Ireland over 23,000 referrals were made, which indicates the scale of the issue.

For far too long, it has been politically controversial to take action on alcohol – despite the fact that the link between alcohol and DSGBV has always been categorically undeniable.[85] This must end, the time for action is now.



No one ever helped or supported us – we grew up in a lovely neighbourhood in Artane Dublin where everyone knew what was going on but no one assisted. The police turned a blind eye.

Miriam – Shared Voices contributor



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