



**Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland**  
**Comments on Justice No. 2 Bill & proposed Department of Justice amendments**

**18 September 2015**

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Justice No.2 Bill and proposed amendments on behalf of our local Women's Aid groups. We wish to comment only on selected aspects of the Bill which are most pertinent to our work on domestic & sexual violence and abuse.

- J Section 10: Women's Aid has a number of concerns about the proposal to deduct court imposed fines or debts from benefits, particularly if any of these benefits are replaced by Universal Credit in future. If a court fine was deducted from benefits which were allocated per household instead of per individual, this could amount to collective punishment of an entire family or household for the actions of an individual. Furthermore, we are concerned that such a measure may result in victims of financial abuse being pushed even further into poverty. This could leave victims with fewer options, for example being unable to afford even bus or taxi fare to enable them to physically leave an abusive relationship.
  
- J Section 42: Women's Aid welcomes the provisions on rape pornography and the aim to bring Northern Irish law in this regard in line with the rest of the United Kingdom.
  
- J Firearms amendment: Women's Aid is strongly opposed to any reduction in the age at which children can use firearms. We have grave concerns that any relaxation of gun laws, including the normalisation of gun use among children and young people, would be ultimately detrimental to the safety of victims of domestic violence and their children.

The link between gun ownership and domestic violence is well-established in numerous reports, statistics and studies throughout the industrialised world<sup>1</sup>. There is strong evidence that the presence of a firearm in the home is associated with an increased risk of domestic homicide.<sup>2</sup>

Studies show that a woman is 5 times more likely to be killed by her abuser if that abuser owns a firearm.<sup>3</sup> In a study conducted in domestic violence shelters in the US state of California, in nearly two thirds (64.5%) of the households that contained a gun, the intimate partner had used the firearm against the victim, usually threatening to shoot or kill her.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for example [http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-gun-policy-and-research/publications/IPV\\_Guns.pdf](http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-gun-policy-and-research/publications/IPV_Guns.pdf); <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/guns-and-death/>; <https://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780826592316>;

<sup>2</sup> See <http://archinte.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=623145>;

<sup>3</sup> Jacquelyn C. Campbell et al., *Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multisite Case Control Study*, 93 Am. J. Pub. Health 1089, 1092 (July 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Susan B. Sorenson et al., *Weapons in the Lives of Battered Women*, 94 Am. J. Pub. Health 1412, 1413 (2004).

In GB in 2009-10, there were 44 gun murders, of which 12 appear to be domestic with 10 female victims. Many of these were carried out using legally-held guns. The HMIC has also warned of the devastating consequences of failing to maintain tight gun control particularly where domestic violence is concerned. In its report of September 2015, it noted that firearms licensing procedures in England & Wales were “inexcusably compromising public safety”, and highlighted the dangers of failing to robustly review all applications and remove firearms licences from anyone involved in a domestic violence incident, including retrospective reviews in all policing areas of previously issued firearms certificates.<sup>5</sup>

It must also be borne in mind that domestic violence is a hidden crime with low disclosure rates. Many victims do not report their perpetrators to the police, or even disclose violence and abuse to family members, friends or other professional practitioners. In the Northern Irish context, this means that it is plausible, even likely, that gun licenses have been granted to applicants with a history of domestic violence of which the public, and the firearms licensors, are not aware.

Women’s Aid believes that tighter gun control, and fewer guns in fewer hands including those of children, makes for a safer and less violent society. As we emerge from conflict, we need to ensure that our gun laws are not blind to the blight of domestic violence and the very real danger that the addition of a deadly weapon to domestic violence situations can pose.

For further information about this response please contact:

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**24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline – 0808 802 1414**

**Email Support: [24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org](mailto:24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org)**

**Text support to 07797805839**

*Open to **all women and men** affected by domestic & sexual violence*

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/firearms-licensing-targeting-the-risk.pdf>

### 1.0 Introduction

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic and sexual violence and providing services for women and children. We recognise domestic and sexual violence as forms of violence against women. Women's Aid seeks to challenge attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate domestic and sexual violence and, through our work, promote healthy and non-abusive relationships.

### 2.0 Core work of Women's Aid

The core work of Women's Aid in Northern Ireland, including Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland and local Women's Aid groups is:

- ) To provide refuge accommodation to women and their children suffering mental, physical or sexual abuse within the home.
- ) To run the 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline.
- ) To provide a range of support services to enable women who are affected by domestic and/or sexual violence to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children.
- ) To provide a range of support services to children and young people who have experienced domestic or sexual violence.
- ) To run preventative education programmes in schools and other settings.
- ) To educate and inform the public, media, police, courts, social services and other agencies of the impact and effects of domestic and sexual violence.
- ) To advise and support all relevant agencies in the development of domestic and sexual violence policies, protocols and service delivery.
- ) To work in partnership with all relevant agencies to ensure a joined up response to domestic and sexual violence.

Throughout this consultation response, the term "Women's Aid" is used to reflect the overall Women's Aid movement in Northern Ireland, which is made up of our local Women's Aid groups and Women's Aid Federation. All local Women's Aid groups are members of Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland. Each Women's Aid group offers a range of specialist services to women, children and young people who have experienced domestic violence.

### 3.0 Women's Aid statistics (2013-14)

- ) 999 women and 747 children sought refuge.
- ) 59 women in refuge were supported during their pregnancies and 15 babies were born to women in refuge.
- ) 1,084 one to one support sessions were held with children and young people in refuge.
- ) 3,558 women with 4,869 children accessed the Floating Support service, and a further

1,662 women accessed other Women's Aid outreach services, enabling women to access support whilst remaining in their own homes and communities.

- J 1,554 women participated in a range of group work and personal development programme including *Journey to Freedom* and *You and Me, Mum*.
- J 375 women accessed support from a Women's Aid Women's Safety Worker while their partners or ex partners were undertaking the IDAP perpetrators programme provided by Probation Board Northern Ireland. An additional 128 children were referred to the Women's Safety Worker in 2013-14.
- J The 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline, open to all women and men affected by domestic & sexual violence, managed 55,029 calls.
- J 150 teachers were trained to deliver the Helping Hands programme in primary schools.

#### **4.0 Additional Women's Aid statistical data**

- J Since 1999, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 17,424 women and 16,235 children and young people.
- J Between 1995 – 2014, 429,435 calls were managed by the 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline.

#### **5.0 Statistics: Domestic violence & violence against women**

- J Domestic violence is a violation of Article 5 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights – that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”.
- J The joint DOJ, DHSSPS Strategy “Tackling Violence at Home” estimates that the cost of domestic violence in Northern Ireland, including the potential loss of economic output, could amount to £180 million each year.
- J UNICEF research released in 2006, showing per capita incidence, indicates that there are up to 32,000 children and young people living with domestic violence in Northern Ireland.
- J Where the gender of the victim was known, 72% of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2012/13 were female.<sup>6</sup>
- J Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.<sup>7</sup>

#### **6.0 Domestic & Sexual Violence: Crime statistics (Source: PSNI Statistics 2013/14)**

- J Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2013/14 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (12,720) than the combined total of all the following crimes (12,079) – possession of drugs (3764), shoplifting (6,372) and theft of a motor vehicle (1,943).
- J PSNI Statistics for 13/14 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 19 minutes of every day of the year.

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<sup>6</sup>Findings from the PSNI Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2012/13 N.B. “Adult” defined as aged 18 and over

<sup>7</sup>Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

- ) The total of 12,720 crimes with a domestic motivation in 13/14 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 41 minutes in Northern Ireland.
  
- ) The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 13/14 total 17. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 7. Therefore, 41% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 13/14 had a domestic motivation.
  
- ) There were 550 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2013/14.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2013/14)

Official sources (NISOSMC) estimate that up to 80% of sex crimes are not reported.