

Women and the Refuge

Each month brings an average of 15 new cases to deal with, while there are on average seven cases carried over from the previous month. In relation to repeat cases to the shelter, there is an average of just under four cases each month where women would have to come to the refuge on a previous occasion seeking protection. Nearly 80 per cent of the women coming into the shelter were accompanied by their children.

The majority of women who come to Aoibhneas stay on average no more than four weeks. However, one-fifth of women who come to the refuge stay over four weeks;

- 12.5 per cent stay from four to thirteen weeks;
- 6.7 per cent stay between thirteen and twenty-six weeks;
- 1.2 per cent stay longer than 26 weeks.

Of course women have different needs, circumstances and different rates of recovery. But longer stays also increasingly represent the huge problem women encounter in finding alternative affordable accommodation.

A third of women coming to the refuge during the survey period had children in the very young and vulnerable years of 0-4, while the vast majority of children in the formative period of 5-9 years of age. The concentration of children in these younger age ranges exposed to Domestic Violence, when children are very sensitive and impressionable should be noted as both very young children and slightly older children will experience distress and a range of troubling reaction to Violence in the Home. They require great care and attention in the short-term from the special childcare workers that Aoibhneas already provides. But statutory service providers such as schools, social services and community health care providers should be alert to the range of long-term needs, which such children have.

Women most commonly reported that one or a combination of the following three elements had brought them to the refuge.

- Latest in a series of violent incidents
- Mental/emotional abuse
- Threatening behaviour

Their children's safety was also a point of concern.

Just less than 70 per cent of women had disclosed details of the violence to which they were subject. But women reported finding disclosure about violence difficult, whether they spoke to the family, professional or both. On the other hand, when they disclose, they frequently find inadequate responses to their plight and so cease to discuss it.

Just less than 60 per cent of the respondents had spoken to professionals about their plight. Some respondents had spoken about difficulties for an extended period of time and one woman said that she had been speaking to a social worker for a period of three years about



the violence she was experiencing. And no matter whom they had spoken with, all the respondents were forced to take the ultimate action of leaving their homes to escape the violence. When asked what they would have wanted most to enable them to deal with their experiences, the majority of women responded that they had most needed to be believed and listened to about what was happening to them. Three replied that they most needed counselling.