Sunday 24th February 2013

(for print on Monday 25th February 2013)

Media Release

Is he 2in2u? Stalking and online abuse of young women in dating relationships is on the rise.

* Women’s Aid launches its 2in2u national public awareness campaign to prevent the next generation of domestic abuse.
* Women’s Aid calls for legal protection from domestic abuse for younger women who currently fall outside the law.
* Stalking, including digitally assisted stalking, must be addressed in Irish Law.

On Monday 25th February 2013, Women’s Aid launches its 2in2u national public awareness campaign which highlights the abuse of younger women in dating relationships. The two week long campaign, now in its third year, highlights unhealthy and abusive behaviours. As part of the campaign young women are encouraged to trust their instincts and to take a relationship health check at [www.2in2u.ie](http://www.2in2u.ie) if they are anxious or worried about their boyfriend’s actions. As part of the campaign, Women’s Aid is calling for the Government to extend the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act to cover younger women in dating relationships that are currently left unprotected due to strict co-habitation requirements. The organisation is also highlighting the phenomenon of stalking, including digitally assisted stalking, of younger women in intimate relationships and the need for legal reform.

Speaking at the start of the campaign, Margaret Martin, Director of Women’s Aid, says, “Young women don’t need to be in a ‘domestic’ relationship to experience domestic abuse. Abuse can happen to any woman, at any age and in any type of relationship, including dating relationships. Women’s Aid’s experience and national and international research shows that many young women are at risk from violence and abuse from their boyfriends. In a national survey on domestic abuse in Ireland, almost 60% of those who had experienced severe abuse in intimate relationships first experienced it when they were under the age of 25. A stark reminder of this vulnerability is that 39 young women aged between 18-25 years of age have been killed since 1996. Of the resolved cases, 53% of the women were murdered by their partners or ex-partners.”

Ms Martin adds, “The Women’s Aid 2in2u campaign is specifically targeting younger women to try to prevent the next generation of domestic abuse. The 2in2u campaign highlights unhealthy and abusive behaviours in a relationship in the hope that young women, if informed, might get help before the relationship becomes more established, and it has become harder to leave or get support. Again and again, Women’s Aid hears from women living with domestic abuse that the signs that her partner was possessive and controlling were there from the start. But to her and those around her, it appeared like he was just so into her. Several calls to the Helpline during the 2in2u campaign in previous years began with - `If only I had heard that message when I started going out with him'."

Women’s Aid is particularly concerned about the rising phenomenon of stalking in intimate relationships, including digitally assisted stalking, and the gaps in Irish law that are leaving women unprotected and vulnerable to abuse. As Ms. Martin outlines, “Stalking by a current or former boyfriend is one of the most common forms of stalking but it is not explicitly addressed in current legislation. Stalking is intentional behaviour that is designed to keep women under great duress, controlled and isolated. Callers to our National Freephone Helpline have disclosed that their stalker is: constantly following them, turning up at their workplaces, homes and social gatherings; damaging property and breaking into their homes or cars; gathering information on them from family and friends; harassing others close to them and threatening to kill them, their families or threatening to self-harm. It can often include physical and sexual assaults.”

Ms. Martin says, “More and more, Women’s Aid is hearing from women using our services about various forms of digitally assisted stalking where technology is being used by abusive boyfriends and ex-boyfriends to monitor and control women, particularly younger women. Women have disclosed abuse such as their mobile phone calls and texts being monitored and social media and technology being used to stalk and control them. Women are also disclosing how they are bombarded with texts and calls often telling them, in explicit detail, how they will be attacked or even killed. Some women disclosed that their current or ex-boyfriends were stalking them on social networking sites.”

Ms. Martin continues, “We hear from women whose online use was being tracked and scrutinised and whose boyfriends demanded access to their private email and social networking accounts. We also hear from women whose boyfriends and ex-boyfriends had placed lies about them on internet sites. We also hear from women who had been photographed and filmed without their consent, sometimes having sex, and having the images uploaded to the internet. Women have told us they feel like they are constantly being watched and that their privacy is completely invaded and controlled. Quite often it prevents women from seeking help as they fear their boyfriend will see that they have rung a helpline, looked at a domestic violence support website or spoken of the abuse to their friends, family or colleagues in an email or text.

A young college student, Niamh\* contacted Women’s Aid when harassment from her ex-boyfriend had become so bad that she was unable to face going back to college. According to Niamh,

“My ex-boyfriend Dave used to put me down in front of my family and friends all the time, and the way he would just give me that look sometimes, the look that said ‘you’re in for it’. I couldn’t take it any more so I told him I didn’t want to be with him, that I needed to be by myself at the moment. ..I thought because of all the things he said that I would never hear from him again. And I didn’t for a few weeks. Then the texts started, first in the middle of the night and then all day long, text after text, calling me names, then telling me how sorry he was and that he loved me and wanted to get back with me. …Then the worse thing ever happened. I logged into my Facebook account one day to find my profile picture had been replaced by a nude one. I didn’t even know when the photo had been taken. It looked like I was asleep. Then I saw a post from Dave, it just said ‘slut’. I knew then it was him, he must have been able to access my Facebook account. I just logged out and didn’t know what to do, what would people think, I couldn’t go back to college, everyone had seen this.

Thankfully a friend put Niamh in touch with Women’s Aid and we were able to give her practical and emotional support.

Women’s Aid maintains that as well as practical support young women like Niamh need to see changes in Irish law to increase their safety and protect them from further abuse. Women's Aid recently commissioned a piece of legal research on international best practice in Domestic Violence legislation in other jurisdictions including the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Austria. This research, together with women's experience of the Irish legal system, has provided a series of recommendations that, if acted upon, would immediately increase protection for women affected by domestic abuse.

Ms. Martin adds, “Women’s Aid is calling on the Government to recognise that abuse within relationships can feature even when relationships aren’t ‘domestic’. Young women who have never lived with their boyfriends are not covered under the Domestic Violence Act and therefore cannot avail of legal protection. Eligibility for safety orders must be extended to this group of women. Women’s Aid is also calling for better legislation to include the specific offence of stalking including the provision of restraining/non-harassment orders to protect the victim from future harassment. Women’s Aid also calls for stalking, including digitally assisted stalking, to be explicitly recognised as grounds for applying for a safety order. Until these changes are made, young women in dating relationships remain outside the law.”

The 2in2u campaign starts today, Monday 25th February and continues until International Women’s Day, 8th March 2013. Women’s Aid encourages young women to trust their instincts within a relationship and to be aware of unhealthy behaviour. Ms Martin concludes, “Remember, if something feels wrong, it probably is. Visit 2in2u.ie and take a relationship health check or call the Women’s Aid National Freephone 1800 341 900 if you are anxious or worried about your relationship.”

End.

**Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline 1800 341 900, open 10am to 10pm, 7 days a week.**

**Notes to editors/producers**

* \*Niamh’s story is based on real accounts as told to the Women’s Aid National Freephone Helpline. Details have been changed to protect identity and the confidential nature of our services. Full case study available here: <http://www.womensaid.ie/media/casestudies>
* Women’s Aid spokeswomen available. Also available for radio and press interview is Jennifer Perry, a UK based expert on digital stalking and author of “Digital Stalking: A Guide to Technology Risks for Victims.” (Network for Surviving Stalking and Women’s Aid UK, 2011)
* Pictures available from Paul Sharp at Sharppix from Sunday 24th February 2013. Telephone 086 6689087 or email paul@sharppix.ie.
* The 2in2u campaign targets women (aged 18-25 years old) and runs for two weeks from 25th February to 8th March and includes a takeover of the front and back of the Metro Herald on 25th February and postcard, poster and online advertising.
* According to Women's Aid, 1 in 5 women over the age of 18 experience physical, emotional and sexual abuse in Ireland. 39 women aged between 18 and 25 years old have died violently in the Republic of Ireland since 1996. Of the resolved cases, 53% of women were killed by a partner or former partner.
* In a national survey on domestic abuse conducted by the National Crime Council, almost 60% of people who had experienced severe abuse in intimate relationships experienced the abuse for the first time under the age of 25.
* In the UK, 1 in 7 women students responded to a National Union of Students survey to say that they had experienced a serious physical or sexual assault during their time as a student. In the same survey 12% of women disclosed they had been stalked while at university.
* Also in the UK, recent crime statistics show that women aged 16 and 34 were more likely than any of the other age groups, male or female, to be victims in the previous year of sexual assaults, non-sexual partner abuse, stalking or overall domestic abuse.
* Young women affected by dating abuse can call the Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline on 1800 341 900 (10am to 10pm) or log on to [www.2in2u.ie](http://www.2in2u.ie) and [www.womensaid.ie](http://www.womensaid.ie) at any time.
* Women's Aid is a leading national organisation providing support and information to women affected by violence and abuse in intimate relationships. It runs the National Freephone Helpline 1800 341 900 and Dublin based one to one and court accompaniment services.
* Helping Women’s Aid launch the 2in2u campaign are members of the Y Factor Project. The Y Factor is an initiative of the National Women’s Council of Ireland that aims to empower and support young people between the ages of 16 and 25 to become leaders for women’s equality. ([www.yfactor.ie](http://www.yfactor.ie))
* The 2in2u campaign is funded by Cosc, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence. ([www.cosc.ie](http://www.cosc.ie))