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How is the safety of women not an election priority?

AS part of my work, I am exposed to all sorts of horror inflicted on women that seeps through the news on a daily basis. At this point, none of the stories of violence shock me; the rapes, the murders, the abuse, the coercion.

It is shameful to admit – especially as a woman – that I've almost become accustomed to it. But sitting across from Brigid (Biddy) McLaughlin in a café this week, listening to her recalling the gruesome details of the murder of her sister Siobhán by her husband Brian Kearney – something awakened in me. Something that feels a little like fury.

As a mother, I cannot get the vision of Siobhán's last moments out of my mind. The fear she must have felt as she was garrotted by a Hoover flex. Her last thought must have been a longing for her tiny son, who was playing downstairs, oblivious to the horror happening overhead.

Still reeling, my rage was compounded by an email I received the same day. It was from Women's Aid, highlighting their 50-year anniversary.

Despite working to prevent and address domestic abuse, including coercive control, violence and abuse remain, according to the organisation – a 'fact of life' for too many women in Ireland.

I realised that, all my life as a woman, I was still taking for granted that this is just what happens. My tools of defence? Paltry, to say the least. Not getting too drunk, or walking in dark places. Keeping my keys splayed in my hand if I found myself in a deserted spot. Getting a friend to take the reg number of a taxi driver, 'just in case'.

A regular tactic has involved just praying to God that the worst doesn't happen – and although that's not ideal for me, this flimsy hope is the antithesis of the world I envisage for my beautiful young daughters.

There was so much talk of change following the savage daylight killing of teacher Ashling

Murphy in January 2022.

Nothing, as far as I can see – despite the promises outlined in the Government's impressively named Zero Tolerance Third National Strategy for Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence – has been done to protect women in any way, shape or form.

In fact, I could fill this page with details of the numerous murders and vicious rapes of women in the almost three years since Ashling's death – and that's just what has been reported in the media. Obviously, there are countless other horrors that may never come to light.

Back in 1974, when Women's Aid was founded by the late Nuala Fennell, I wonder did they have any idea what they were trying to deal with. As it stands, the organisation conservatively estimates that it has responded to at least 600,000 contacts from women across generations.

AND of course, there exists a spectrum of misogyny, from psychological to physical. When Siobhán McLaughlin was murdered, and Rachel O'Reilly (nee Callaly) two years before her, at the hands of controlling husbands, we didn't know much about gaslighting and coercive control, which doesn't necessarily end in such brutality.

At least we are finally speaking about this violence, which keeps women small and controlled, thinking they may be going insane. We know abuse doesn't always leave bruises. But now, there are new, equally worrying issues that also need attention.

Pornography is an obvious one, but I was shocked to read that new research shows 'traditionalist' views on the rise, with two in five men believing that being dominant, holding more power and control over their partner, equals true masculinity.

And this isn't from an elderly cohort; according to Women's Aid, traditionalists are more likely to be men in their twenties, who may be 'influenced by contemporary online figures who promote traditional masculinity'.



Maura's reality TV return is what I'm a Celeb needed

BY NOW, many of us are familiar with Maura Higgins's outspoken ways – and that's why we love her. The Longford lass, left, and former Love Islander is ensuring TV gold in I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here, and from the off, she's causing hilarity. The television personality, 33, made her appearance as a late arrival to the show

during Thursday night's episode alongside former '80s pop star, Reverend Richard Coles, and her irreverent humour kicked into gear immediately. Before Maura and Rev Richard settled down in their bed, she confessed: 'I never actually thought I'd see the day that I'm about to sleep with a vicar' – before adding – 'But my friends wouldn't be shocked.' Maura, never

SO obviously, it's flipping freezing – but there's warmth on the horizon with Willow-Warm Schools Christmas competition. WillowWarm briquettes are looking for sustainability efforts from primary schools for a chance to win a book reading with our very own columnist and avid

reader Ryan Tubridy. Other prizes includes one tonne of WillowWarm for the winning teacher and €1,000 for the winning school. Sustainability efforts can be illustrated through a short story, a presentation or a video – see willowwarm.ie, and submit entries by 12 noon on December 4. Toasty.

I pray we follow Australian social media ban for u-16s

FINALLY a country has taken matters into its own hands when it comes to the perils of social media. This week, Australia's communications minister, Michelle Rowland, pictured, introduced a world-first law into parliament that would ban children under 16 from social media, saying online safety was one of parents' toughest challenges. She is not far wrong, and as a parent feeling helpless at the coalface of my own children's digital immersion, I can only pray that Ireland does similar. Of course, not everyone views this progression to protect our kids as positive news. Elon Musk may be a dad himself, but clearly business interests take precedence, as the owner of X issued a warning that Australia's move is the start of a blanket online censorship: 'Seems like a backdoor way to control access to the internet by all Australians,' he snapped on his very own toxic platform. As thousands of people migrate from X, methinks Musk is panicking as his plan for world domination stalls slightly. Diddums.



Two guesses who they might be.

Other disturbing statistics to note – in Ireland, one in three women suffers psychological abuse, one in four women has experienced sexual violence from a partner, and one in five experienced abuse by an intimate partner before the age of 25. But if you're a woman, you already know this. I was out recently with six women, and when the conver-

sation took a turn late in the evening, we realised that out of seven ladies, four had been raped.

This should not simply be taken for granted. We have to – finally – create zero tolerance of this violence. It starts with educating our sons, at home and in society, and continues with both leaders and lay people calling out everyday sexism, misogyny and gender inequality.

Bravo to Saoirse Ronan for highlighting that inherent male oblivion of what women always have to think about recently. We need our judicial system to listen, take us seriously, and deliver certain, harsh punishments accordingly.

And with the general election on the horizon, parties would do well to remember that the safety of women is something that affects every single facet of society. It should be prioritised above all else.

I don't want this legacy for my daughters. Tell me, what mother does?

KILLERS NEED TO BE DEPRIVED OF NORMALITY
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