

World Mental Health Day - 10th October 2017

"When Women Blossom"

Mental Health can affect anyone, it knows no boundaries such as gender, age, social status, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or ethnicity. It is a worldwide epidemic yet suppressed by the stigmatism and stereotypes of what we call a modern society.

Last year, in Belfast & Lisburn, we supported 499 women in the community and in refuge who identified themselves with having mental health issues. Domestic abuse has a profound and lasting impact on the emotional wellbeing of its victims. It can affect a woman's sense of self-esteem, corrode her to the core and steal her sense of identity. She loses herself.

The persistent and often subtle 'drip...drip' effect of coercive control a perpetrator exerts on his victim happens over time and is invisible, but very tangible when manifested in the emotional wellbeing of its victim.

The invisibility of emotional abuse can often result in a woman presenting herself to her doctor with depression or anxiety when in fact it is the situation that is pressing on her. Situational depression is somewhat different to clinical depression. Women are also known to seek medical care with psychosomatic illnesses - the body's physical response to emotional abuse. This can include breathing, stomach and skin problems - this list is not exhaustive.

Women can, at times, turn to self-medication to cope with these feelings. This can include alcohol, prescription drugs, eating disorders, even work, in order to survive and make it through the day, the month, the year.

It is the core work of Women's Aid to listen to the woman, be non-judgemental and believe her. Quite often women "will blossom" as a result of the invaluable support our Support Workers provide, combined with the emotional exoneration that she is not to blame for the abuse she has endured and survived. She is a witness to her own story.

Sarah Bruce & Dympna McKeown

Women's aid

Belfast and Lisburn