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### **Rates of gender-based violence are increasing due to conflict and climate change. What can Ireland do ?**

Stranger danger has become a phrase we all associate from childhood. It's meant to warn children of the potential threat of the people who are unknown to us. Why is it then that according to public policy 87% of women were killed by a man known to them? Should the phrase not be Familiar danger then. How is the unsettling reality that harm frequently comes from the people closest to us overshadowed? The stark realisation that the people closest to us might be the very individuals who are most likely to be a threat.

Gender based violence increases during times of war and conflict. This includes sexual violence, forced and early marriages and intimate partner violence. Historically, honour and shame have constrained women and led them to be commodified by men. Conflict has always existed so why are the rates still increasing? According to UN Women 137 women are killed by a family member each day. These women are murdered by relatives usually male in an effort to reclaim family "honour". This global culture of discrimination against women and the deeply rooted belief that women are objects and commodities, not human beings entitled to dignity and rights equal to those of men. Violence against women is a global epidemic and it effects women in every level of society.

Climate Change and gender-based violence is also interlinked. Poverty, food insecurity, aid dependency and trauma put refugees and forcibly displaced women and children at risk of violence. Communities under pressure may turn to harmful coping mechanisms like child marriage, to try reduce the people living on a limited income. When women migrate away from their support networks to find alternative livelihoods, their risk of being exposed to violence increases. When women are displaced, they may be forced to stay in unsafe conditions, temporary accommodation placing them at greater risk. When a further strain of societal structures occurs, communities become more susceptible to conflict and there is an increased risk of gender-based violence due to disrupted social norms. The loss of traditional roles may also contribute to an increase in domestic violence.

Gender inequality is the root cause of Gender based violence. When women and girls are not given the right support and aid their risk of exploitation and abuse increases. Virginia Woolf's extended essay "A room of one's own " connects to broader theme of a women's autonomy and how restricted access to personal spaces can contribute to women's vulnerability to various forms of violence. Woolf's call for women to have a room of their own extends beyond literal spaces to cover the broader concept of freedom from oppressive of societal structures, which are connected to addressing Gender based violence. The power play between men and women reinforces the inequality and increases and the likelihood of violence for women.

The concealment of the deaths in the mother and baby homes in Ireland prolonged the suffering of vulnerable women but also contributed to silence surrounding gender-based violence hindering and preventing such abuses in society. These homes were a place to provide refuge for unwed mothers and their babies who were left without adequate support or family. These institutes were funded by the Irish government. Statistics show a child died in the home every 2 weeks. Some women's pregnancies were a result of rape and

exploitation and then suffering from emotional and some cases physical violence when entering these homes.

Ireland needs to take steps to prevent gender-based violence in Ireland. We must not stay silent as these heinous crimes are perpetrated. These victims will be silent forever, but justice must be served. We must be the voice for the women that had theirs taken away from them. We often forget the girls and women who were subject to gang rape on October 7th. We often forget the 100,000 women who were raped by red army soldiers during World War 2. We often forget the forced sterilisation of women in Sweden. We must not forget. Gender based violence is not an old tale. This is a stark reminder that the battlefield of women's bodies is not fought on the front lines but in every fabric of society where the scars of violence persists are a haunting reminder for the urgent need for change.