



HAVEN HORIZONS
National Education and Research Centre
Ending Relationship Abuse



TUS

PRESS RELEASE

New TUS Research Examines Importance of Accredited Interagency Training for Domestic Abuse Frontline Professionals and Haven Horizons calls for €1,000,000 for Research and Knowledge Centre

Haven Horizons and Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) today (13 June) hosted a powerful Symposium “*Interagency Training Saves Lives*” which examined the impact of the delivery of the accredited continuous professional development training *Reflecting on and Responding to Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control*.

Findings from new research by Dr Melinda Gushwa, Head of Applied Social Sciences, TUS, indicated the importance of interagency training for frontline professionals in the domestic abuse field and led to calls for a fundamental change in how funding is allocated to the sector.

Dr Gushwa said, “Graduates were overwhelmingly positive about the course and its impact on their understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse and coercive control. They were able to take what they learned in the course and immediately apply that knowledge to their practice. This type of learning is transformative and has the power to impact how individuals, agencies and communities respond to domestic abuse and coercive control.”

Madeline Mc Aler Research, Training, and Development Director of Haven Horizons and lecturer who delivers the interagency training said: “This research confirms that we need to radically change how we respond to domestic abuse and coercive control. Interagency training delivered geographically is crucial for frontline professionals to overcome the very real barriers that currently exist to effective interagency collaboration.” In calling for €1,000,000 to be allocated to the Haven Horizons / TUS Research and Knowledge Centre over the next 3 years, Mc Aler outlined the need to continue the work of the centre and to radically increase the delivery of geographical training and the establishment of local area networks.

Commenting on the partnership between TUS and Haven Horizons President of TUS Vincent Cunnane echoed Haven Horizons’ call for funding and said: “As the President of TUS, I want to reiterate that we are committed to strengthening the relationship between Haven Horizons and TUS and supporting the Research and Knowledge Centre. This training for professionals delivered through the Flexible

Learning Department in TUS is a vital component in combating domestic, sexual and gender-based abuse and driving real societal change.”

Statistics show that despite the unprecedented investment in frontline services for victims of domestic abuse, there is still a tsunami of domestic abuse in Irish society. From 2020 to 2021 there was a shocking 399% increase in domestic abuse-motivated sexual offences. 2022 was the deadliest year in a decade for domestic abuse-related homicides. In 2023, 54, 000 domestic abuse-related incidents were reported to AGS which represents an 8% increase from the year before.

The Symposium brought together a range of speakers with expertise in the domestic abuse field including the keynote speaker Dr Stephanie O’Keefe, CEO of Cuan, the new statutory Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency (DSGBV) and Minister of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Patrick O’Donovan.

Detective Chief Superintendent Colm Noonan, Head of the Garda National Services Protective Bureau, provided valuable insights into the recent developments in An Garda Síochána’s response to domestic abuse commenting: “Domestic abuse is a carcinogen that has reached every town and estate in Ireland. It is the one call that every Guard will have responded to regardless of their posting, with its effects leeching through generations. In tackling it there needs to be a systemic, multi-faceted response and that is why working with our social justice partners, academics, victims and survivors ensures that An Garda Síochána is not found wanting in our response to this human right’s issue.”

Focusing on the unique barriers to seeking help faced by migrant women who are victims of domestic abuse, Dr Salome Mbugua, CEO of AkiDwA and gender equality activist remarked, “We need to train frontline professionals and increase the understanding that domestic violence affects women and girls disproportionately and that it is based on historical and structural unequal power relations between women and men and intersectional forms of discrimination.”

Suzanne Walker, Senior Executive Officer with the Higher Education Authority, who leads the Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education programme, welcomed the findings of the research saying, “What we must remember is that sexual violence and harassment are not inevitable, they are preventable manifestations of inequitable power relations, the consequences are devastating for individuals and society. Training plays a crucial part in developing new responses.”

The accredited training course was developed by Madeline Mc Aleer of Haven Horizons and Dr Lisa O’Rourke Scott from TUS. At the Symposium Dr O’Rourke-Scott outlined how a Memorandum of Understanding between the EDGE (Exploring diversity, gender and equality) Research Group Research Group, part of Social Sciences ConneXions Research Institute at TUS and Haven Horizons

has led to innovative developments and projects and said: “Collaboration between different sectors requires resources and funding if it is to be effective. Organisations need ringfenced funding if frontline professionals are to participate in interagency training and collaborative practices. The memorandum of understanding between TUS and Haven Horizons was developed to further this aim.”

The course has been delivered eight times by Madeline Mc Aleer to a hundred and thirty frontline professionals from a range of backgrounds. Ireland’s Third National Strategy and the Istanbul Convention highlight the importance of both accredited training for frontline professionals and closer interagency collaboration.

NOTES TO EDITORS

TUS – Technological University of the Shannon – created by the amalgamation of the Athlone Institute of Technology and Limerick Institute of Technology in 2021

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Background Information

Haven Horizons is a national voluntary organisation dedicated to ending domestic, sexual, and gender-based Abuse. It focuses on prevention activities including education, research, collaborative partnerships, and piloting best-practice models. Haven Horizons has established a National Gender-based Abuse Research and Knowledge Centre.