



HAVEN HORIZONS

National Domestic Abuse Prevention Centre

PRESS RELEASE

Immediate Release

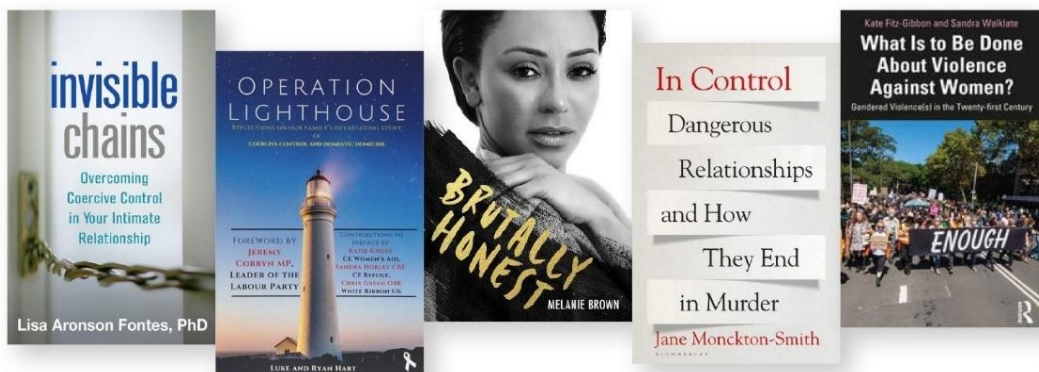
‘5 Books That Could Save Your Life Project’ aims to transform All-Island Conversation on Coercive Control.

“Research shows the tactics of coercive control are difficult to recognise but it is often more dangerous than physical violence and is more likely to lead to domestic homicide”.

Domestic abuse experts Madeline Mc Alear from *Haven Horizons*, Danielle Roberts from *Reclaim the Agenda* and Noelle Collins from *Belfast & Lisburn Women’s Aid* gathered in Ennis today (Friday, 7 March) at the Temple Gate Hotel discussing 5 selected books to highlight the impact of coercive control and its link to domestic homicide and consider what needs to be done to eliminate domestic, sexual and gender-based abuse and coercive control from Irish society.

The event, moderated by Irish Examiner columnist Sarah Harte, took place on the first day of the Ennis Book Club Festival and was attended by a packed house.

Madeline Mc Alear, Research, Training, and Development Director, Haven Horizons, said, *“These books deliver valuable lessons, including that most domestic homicides do not from a spontaneous burst of anger. They are predictable and, therefore, preventable if you understand the red flags and progressive pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour adopted by perpetrators towards their partners. The reporting of coercive control across Ireland is increasing annually. Today’s event was about identifying coercively controlling behaviour as highly dangerous and the key driver of domestic homicide. We want to start a conversation that changes people’s understanding of coercive control. Only then can we implement new, transformative policies and prevention measures that eliminate coercive control and domestic homicide.”*



The panel discussed '5 Books That Could Save Your Life', considering why the rates of coercive control and domestic homicide are so high across the island, and why they are higher in Northern Ireland. A report of domestic abuse is made to the PSNI every 16 minutes, domestic abuse accounts for a fifth of all crimes in Northern Ireland, and the femicide rate is the second highest in Europe. In the Republic of Ireland, An Garda Síochána responded to 65,000 incidents of domestic abuse – an increase of 45% in the last four years in 2024. 2022 was the deadliest year in a decade -12 women and 5 children were murdered.

The panel also explored how anyone can find themselves in a coercively controlling relationship, including men and those in LGBTQ relationships, but most victims of coercive control are women and girls with professional women being particularly susceptible to being entrapped in a coercively controlling relationship.

Noelle Collins, Training and Programmes Manager, Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid, said, "*The fact that this event was booked out shows an interest in discovering more about this topic. This information could save someone's life. Any person can be a victim of coercively controlling behaviour; coercive control cuts across all social strata. The ambition of this '5 Books that Could Save Your Life' project is to raise awareness and understanding of coercive control and frame a new all-island response to domestic abuse and coercive control.*"

This innovative '5 Books that Could Save Your Life' project is supported by the Shared Island Civic Society Fund, Department of Foreign Affairs. It is part of an all-island conversation, with further events in Dublin and Belfast later this year. The project concludes with a webinar in November, during which the authors discuss their books, their motivations for writing them, and the importance of sharing knowledge and considering this topic from different perspectives.

Danielle Roberts, Communications and Sustainability Coordinator, Reclaim The Agenda, said, "*There is a tsunami of domestic abuse North and South, which has a huge impact on the victims, on their families, and also on society. This project involves a dialogue to facilitate a broader social understanding of coercive control and seeks to initiate real cultural change for all. The events in Ennis, Dublin and Belfast mean this project will have an all-island impact, which cannot be overstated.*"

The five books selected for this project include *Invisible Chains* by psychologist Dr Lisa Aronson Fontes, which informs us about the tactics used to create the 'invisible chains' of coercive control. *In Control* by Professor Jane Monckton Smith, a criminologist and former UK police officer, explores the myth that most killers in domestic homicides snap and lose control, explaining how to decode the hidden patterns of coercive control. *What is to be Done About Violence Against Women* by Professors Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Sandra Walklate, experts in domestic abuse and sociology, examines the historical roots of this problem, the need to keep the focus on the perpetrator and their behaviour and the importance of coordinated action at all levels.

Two memoirs include *Operation Lighthouse*, written by Luke and Ryan Hart, and *Brutally Honest*, by coercive control survivor Mel B, former Spice Girl. *Operation Lighthouse* describes how Luke & Ryan's lives were impacted by coercive control and domestic abuse-related homicide when their mother and sister were murdered by their father. *Brutally Honest* outlines how and why anyone, even a famous, wealthy, successful young woman at the height of her career - as Mel B says, any woman can be targeted, entrapped and taken 'hostage' by an abusive

partner. Brown exposes the private reality of living in an abusive, coercively controlling ten-year marriage, *“ruled by clever, manipulative domestic terrorism.”*

Madeline Mc Aleer added: *“If we don’t understand coercive control and its link to domestic homicide, how a relationship can quickly move from honeymoon to homicide more people will die. We need to transform our response to this pervasive problem. Critically this means instituting a multi-level response with coordinated action at 3 levels of social policy, law and ideology with a firm commitment to prevention.”*

Haven Horizons, a national organisation dedicated to the primary prevention of domestic abuse and coercive control based in Ennis, Co. Clare, set up the project and developed a partnership with two Belfast-based organisations, *Reclaim the Agenda* and *Belfast & Lisburn Women’s Aid*, to explore an all-Ireland approach to tackling coercive control and domestic homicide.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

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The ‘Five Books’ project will run throughout 2025 – upcoming events:

- 30 May: Titanic Experience, Belfast
- 11 June: Seamus Heaney Centre, Queen’s University Belfast
- Dublin (TBC)
- 20 November: Webinar with authors – [booking link](#)