What difference does peace make? A Comparative Study of Intimate Partner Abuse in a Conflict and Post-Conflict Setting

Monica McWilliams and Jessica Doyle, PSAI 2016, Belfast

Context

▸ Domestic violence: A pattern of "assaultive and coercive behaviours including physical, sexual and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion used by adults or adolescents against their current or former intimate partners" (UNICEF, 2006)

▸ Domestic violence is a global issue, but it takes on specific modalities in different cultural and geo-political settings

▸ Research suggests a relationship exists between DV and armed conflict (McWilliams Aoláin, 2013; Saile, Neuner, Ertl, & Catani, 2013; Annan & Brier, 2010; Clark, et al., 2010)

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Armed Conflict and Domestic Violence

▸ How are armed conflict and domestic violence related?

▸ Opportunity

▸ Instrumentality

▸ Sanction

▸ **Impunity**

▸ Reporting and Naming

▸ **Availability of resources**

(Swaine, 2015)

▸

Objectives of Research

▸ Explore experiences of and responses to domestic violence in Northern Ireland

▸ Assess the changes in experiences of/responses to DV as we transition from conflict to post-conflict in Northern Ireland

Done by applying and updating the methodology used in the 1992 study (McWilliams and McKiernan, 1993)

Questions Asked

▸ What are women's experiences of domestic violence in Northern Ireland?

▸ How have these experiences changed (or remained the same) as we have moved from a conflict to post-conflict setting?

▸ What is the relationship between political violence and domestic violence?
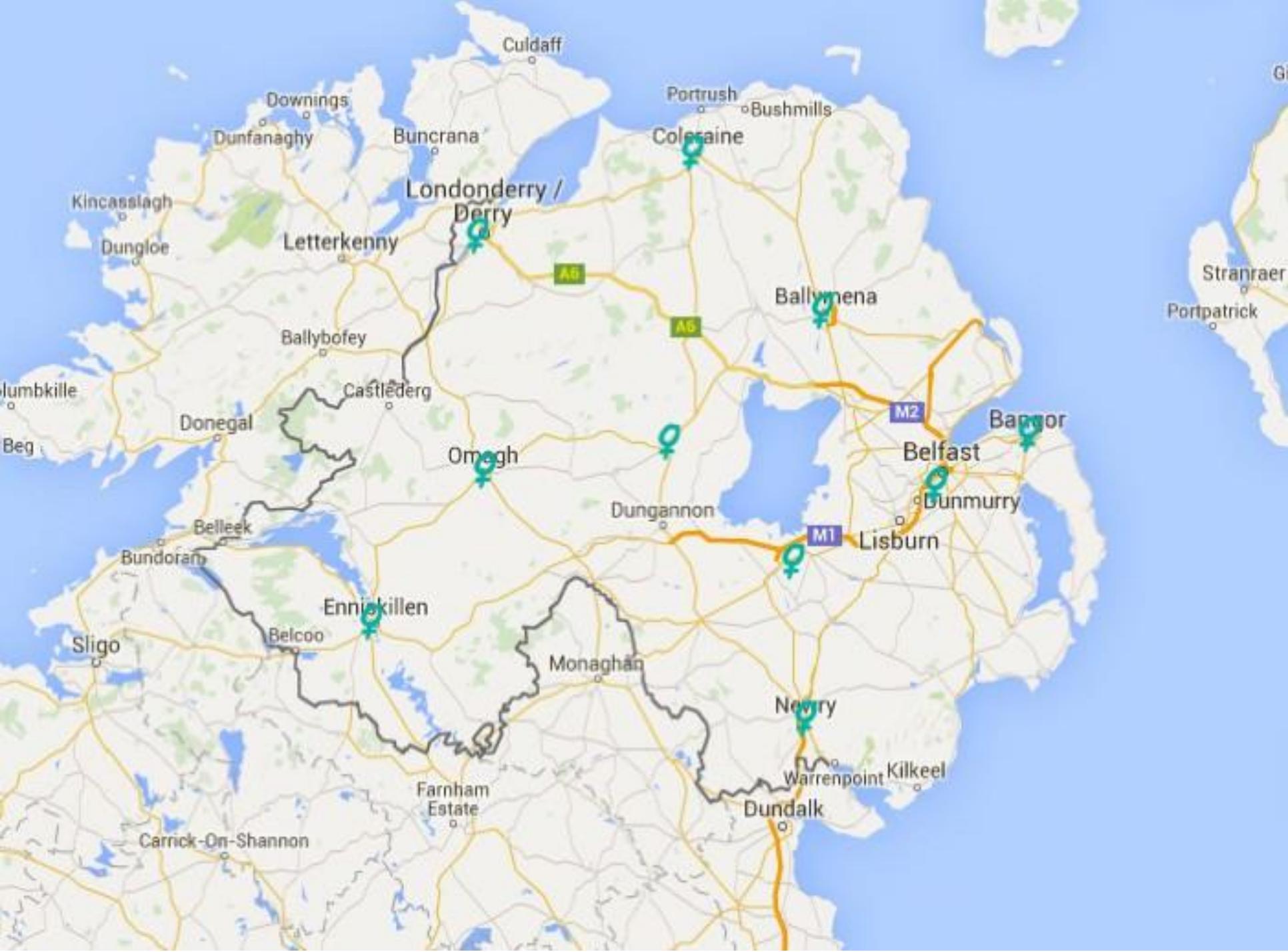
Research Design

Phase 1

- Purposive sampling (snowball)
- c.70-80 interviews with women survivors of DV from across NI (wide geographic spread)
- Systematic coding scheme for interview transcriptions

Phase 2

- c. 30-50 interviews with 'help-providers'
- Including: Health and social workers, police, judiciary, solicitors, housing executive, voluntary sector and women's groups

Data Analysis

Code reference	Description of code	Interviewees referring to code	
HS	Help-seeking	Interviewee number	Overall total
HS1	Spoke to someone about what was happening		
A	Yes	3,5,6,7,9,10	6
B	No	1,2,4,8	4

Results – Experiences and Impact

▸ Study underscores the severity of

  ▸ Physical

  ▸ Sexual

  ▸ Psychological violence

Experience	Yes	No
Physical violence	34/40 (85%)	6/40 (15%)
Insulted/put down (verbal)	40/40 (100%)	0/40 (0%)
Low self esteem	40/40 (100%)	0/40 (0%)
Left work	34/40 (85%)	6/40 (15%)
Restricted contact with family/friends	37/40 (92.5%)	3/40 (7.5%)
Insisted on knowing whereabouts	34/40 (85%)	6/40 (15%)
Financially controlling	36/40 (90%)	4/40 (10%)
Forbid from leaving home/took away keys	31/40 (77.5%)	9/40 (22.5%)

Experiences and Impact Continued

▸ Physical violence was incredibly severe: 37.5% of all murders in 2014/5 had a domestic violence motivation

▸ Sexual violence was pervasive and often unrecognised

'I woke up and he was inside [me], and I was like "get off , get off, what are you doing?" He [said] "I'm your husband, you're my wife, I can do what I want to you". I couldn't breathe. It could've been rape and I wouldn't have known it was rape - that's being truthful'

▸ Control: Limit capacity to participate

▸ Mental abuse described as "torture" and relentless

▸

Experiences and Impact

▸ Many women could not:
  ▸ Work outside the home
  ▸ Pursue further education
  ▸ Other activities (hobbies)

▸ Loss of self confidence/esteem, chronic depression, anxiety, panic attacks, self-harm and attempted suicide

  'After a while I couldn't even think about the simplest things, I couldn't make a decision on anything. I just walked around saying "I don't know, I don't know"

▸ **What does this mean for our capacity to end political conflict and build inclusive peace?**

▸

Results - Impunity

▸ Lack of access to criminal justice system

 ▸ Domestic violence seen as 'soft crime'

 ▸ Police "not people that you can normally go to"

 ▸ 'No go' zones for police: "the police won't answer calls"

▸ Far greater reporting

 ▸ ~37% more women in 2016 study had reported an incident

 ▸ 1992: 2,800 reports to RUC

 ▸ 2015: 28,287 reports to PSNI

▸ Issues remain in post conflict environment

"The police wouldn't come into that estate. [The paramilitaries] were ruling it."

▸

Results - Availability of Resources

‣ Weapons

  ‣ *"Guns increase his power and increase her fear"*

  ‣ Impact of decommissioning: only 2/63 reported arms

‣ Status/power

  ‣ Gained through membership of an organization

  ‣ Prevent women from naming/reporting violence

  ‣ Still prevalent in 2016 research: *"He warned me not to get the Police – that I'd get my two knees done, or my brother would. So I had to keep it inside me and try and block it out."*

Results – Legacy of the Conflict

'He put it out there that I was a Police informant – I'm from a Catholic area so to put me out as a Police informant is highly dangerous'

'Somebody did say to me "one word in the right ear and you can get him beat up" and I just went "don't be beating him up in my name thanks very much!"

'I think the Troubles affected me probably as an adult as a decision maker. We put up with so much and there was a lot of apathy around bad, really bad situations. You got used to seeing violence and stuff and that had an impact on what you consider to be really bad. I would say that had a big impact on me.'

Concluding Remarks

1. The research supports findings from other empirical studies on the relationship between DV and armed conflict

2. Supports frameworks which suggest that variables such as impunity and availability of resources assist with understanding the prevalence of DV in conflict settings

3. Draws our attention to the post-conflict environment and need to formulate evidence-based DV policies that pay attention to that environment