

SUCCESS STORIES

## Positive steps after marriage breakup

Fiona is a farmer's wife and the mother of four young adult children. Fiona gave up her off-farm employment to be at home full time and to assist with the running of the farm a couple of years after marrying. She was finding working away from home and having to help out morning and evening with farm work tiring and exhaustive. Fiona highlighted that giving up her employment left her financially dependent on her husband and other members of his family also involved in their farming enterprise. These new circumstance generated feelings isolation, low self-esteem and loss of identity



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Name of the interviewed	Fiona Casey
Type of farming activity	Mixed farming including dairy enterprise
Mental health issue and affecting factors	High levels of stress anxiety and depression due to marriage relationship breakdown brought about by mental, emotional and at times physical abuse and coercive control

### What is your story?

Fiona expressed finding herself in a difficult non loving relationship very difficult. She was also subjected to increasing physical mental and emotional abuse; she did not know who or where to go for help or who she could trust to be supportive, She also felt personally embarrassed to find herself in this situation and did not wish to burden her own close family members. Fiona expressed how the signs of her marriage beginning to break down impacted on her emotionally

As time went by the impact of losing her independence, having little or no communication with friends and people away from the farm impacted on her self-esteem and self-confidence. The marriage relationship became more and more difficult to endure. Fiona also began to see how the deterioration in her marriage was impacting on their children. There were many attempts by their father to influence them against her. She also began to realise that she was in a coercive relationship which was very unhealthy, extremely difficult and controlling. She became concerned about her own state of mental health and wellbeing and that of their children.

Fiona expressed that one of the biggest challenges she had to deal with was to make it appear when in public and during family occasions that all was normal. It was she said "an enormous pressure to appear to "be a contented person in the company of other people".

### Handling the situation

Fiona spoke about how she did not seek help for her situation as she felt extremely embarrassed, did not know what her own family and relatives would react. However, she continued to function silently as best she could and said how she believed she was in denial of the reality of her situation.

Her opportunity to open up about her personal trauma occurred when she was attending counselling for support to deal with the loss of a very close family member due to death by suicide and with whom she had a very deep and special family relationship. It was during one of these counselling sessions that she disclosed about the personal trauma she was experiencing in her marriage, her concerns around the coercive control and the impact that these circumstances were having on her then young adolescent children

This was the first occasion that she spoke in confidence about her personal circumstances, and she claims it was a big relief. During those sessions, the Counsellor recognised the trauma and stress being experienced. As Fiona said "the Counsellor helped me peel away the layers of my stress. This was for me, the first opportunity I had to "get it all out from my throat". I had been trapped and did not know how to cope"

In line with these sessions and coming to the realisation that she needed to separate from her husband, she began to make arrangements to leave the family home with her children. This was very stressful and difficult, it was necessary to seek legal support, This action generated another barrier as her husband refused to cooperate. Nether would he agree to marriage or mediation counselling, Fiona had very limited personal funds but made the decision to move on and get out of the situation. Fiona had to resort to taking her husband to Court to establish her legal and financial supports for herself and their children. This was a very difficult stressful journey and very costly.

Fiona identified what helped her most was having the support of her own family once she had opened up to them with the support of the Counselling she had received. She also learned that she needed such caring support, and to realise that she did not have to remain in a difficult, abusive, and coercive relationship that was impacting on her mental and physical health and that of their children

Fiona expressed that although it was difficult and in some limited ways continues to be so, taking the legal action and going to Court was an important step to establish her rights as a separated person, the financial support for herself, to be able to rent a house and provide education for their children.

Also important for Fiona, now that she was living away from the farm home she could renew and restore a number of her lost friendships. This helped her gain confidence and belief in herself.

Fiona availed of opportunities to retrain and upskill giving her a new sense of confidence and self-esteem. Through these new achievements Fiona was successful in acquiring meaningful temporary employment that has since opened new opportunities.

### Conclusion and tips

Fiona identified what helped her most was having the support of her own family once she had opened up to them with the support of the Counselling she had received. She also learned that she needed such caring support, and to realise that she did not have to remain in a difficult, abusive, and coercive relationship that was impacting on her mental and physical health and that of their children

Fiona expressed that although it was difficult and continues to be so although she is now living independently with her children, that taking the necessary legal action and going to Court was an important step. This action establishes her rights and legal entitlements as a separated person, being granted financial support for herself, to be able to rent a house and provide education for their children.

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This trauma that she experienced has helped her be empathetic to other people in similar situations, and in saying that she was mindful that a man can find himself the subject of a difficult relationship and not know where to turn to for help.

Regained self-belief in herself and knowing that she has much to offer others because of her lived experience.

Very important for Fiona as she expressed "I am t proud that I addressed the situation for myself and our family

### Tips to other farmers

Fiona expressed the following to anyone who may find themselves in such situation. From her, we can learn that it is important to be proactive when in a vulnerable situation. Here you can find some tips:

- Build up self-confidence through attending support groups personal development course available locally or online
- Talking is very helpful. Open up to people that can be trusted as it is important to be careful who you talk to in this type of situation
- Seek out independent professional support i.e., not someone that knows both families as in a family doctor or legal person as they may be biased and takes sides if they have to provide court reports Therefore, avoid using the family doctor, find another GP to look after your health needs and any medical certs that maybe required.
- Fiona highlighted to be aware about the circumstances and situation she found herself in is in fact not unusual and that there is help and support available in term of counselling, medical and legal advice.
- Where there are younger family members involved, get appropriate support/counselling for them to help them understand and cope with the situation on hand.
- It can also be beneficial to learn about the warning signs of coercive control so that the emerging situation can be managed sooner rather than later.
- Use help lines that provide support services

Some 1.7 million marriages and an estimated 0.7 million divorces took place in the EU in 2021, according to the most recent data available for the EU Member

Undoubtedly marriage break up is very stressful and upsetting irrespective of the reasons. When it does happen, professional advice is crucial to achieve the best outcomes for the parties concurred and family members.

Farming is not just a job it's a way of life and for farming families, life on the farm and life at home are blended .It can be like living over the shop premises. Work is always at the doorstep. In most fam family situations, the spouse can also be the business partner silent or otherwise and responsible for a lot of the paperwork associated with regulations and compliance. Running a farm can put pressures on marriage and family relationships - long hours taken up by farming, important events missed, financial difficulties and so on. Any number of things can upset and lead to mental strain in a relationship.

Successful family farming requires a regular open honest dialogise between the parties. Such an approach can reduce the risk of the family farm business being put at risk perhaps ending up in a legal dispute, lead to mental and physical health problems and at worst suicide.

Victims of domestic violence often feel "fear, shame, stigma" about their situation and this, along with other factors, can hold them back from seeking the help and support they deserve and need".

"Coercive control is a persistent pattern of controlling, coercive and threatening behaviour including all or some forms of domestic abuse (emotional, physical, financial, sexual including threats) by a boyfriend, partner, husband, or ex. It traps women in a relationship and makes it impossible or dangerous to leave. Coercive control can damage a woman's physical and emotional well-being."

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Check these resources from Ireland services:

[Women's Aid Ireland](#)

It is important to note that men can also be the subject of these issues relating to domestic abuse and coercive control

CEO of Men's Aid has stated said that when it comes to the farming community, it is "very conscious" of situations "behind front doors" where there are partners "that are controlling the farm, controlling the finances, controlling the family as well and indeed, part of that is [controlling] the dad, their husbands". [agriland.ie/farming-news/concerning-increase-in-farmers-seeking-help-for-domestic-violence/](https://www.agriland.ie/farming-news/concerning-increase-in-farmers-seeking-help-for-domestic-violence/)

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