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## Mother vows to change the law to protect her son from his father

# 'Women are blamed for their own abuse'

By Debbie McCann

CRIME CORRESPONDENT

A COURAGEOUS woman who suffered horrific abuse at the hands of a serving Garda said the family courts allowed her abuser to retain control over her after she found the courage to leave.

In an interview with the Irish Mail on Sunday, Nicola Hanney said she felt Paul Moody's position as a then-serving Garda gave him more credibility in court, allowing him to keep control over her life.

Moody was eventually jailed for three years and three months for coercive control of Ms Hanney in a landmark case in 2022.

The resolute mother, who was being treated for stage-four cancer at the time of the abuse, said she felt she had 'no voice' in the family court. And she told how her biggest fear was that Moody would raise her 'beautiful boy' to be like him after she died.

Ms Hanney, who is due to meet Justice Minister Helen McEntee next month, said she left the violent and controlling relationship to protect her son but added 'the law is not protecting my son'. In a searing indictment of the family



**SURVIVOR:** Nicola Hanney said the court system fails victims and children; right, Dublin's family court



Guardianship was removed from Moody after he pleaded guilty to coercive control of his former partner but when he is released from prison he can apply to the courts for access again.

Ms Hanney said she has been given just 'three years of peace' until Moody is released from prison. But in the meantime, she is determined to use this time to fight for her son and on behalf of other women and children in similar circumstances.

She added: 'Paul always told me that if I did die from the cancer I was suffering, he would make sure my child never saw my family again. He knew it was the worst thing I could imagine.

'Ex-wives are often painted as "women scorned". But the truth is that it's really hard to be a single mother and the vast majority of women would welcome

### 'Court acted like I'd made my bed and could lie in it'

courts system, the abuse survivor said she did not feel properly protected by the system.

Ms Hanney recalled how, at one stage, it was suggested she did not look like an abused woman.

But she told the Mail on Sunday: 'Believe me, I know what an abused woman looks like - she looks like every woman.'

Ms Hanney said the court system made her feel as if she had 'made my bed, and this was how I could lie in it'.

She also said abusers like Moody use the court system and the Child and Family Agency Tusla to further control women.

'The court has said to me that I "chose" the man to have a baby with. The court acted like I had made my bed and so this was how I could lie in it.

'Women are blamed for everything, even our own abuse. I was shut up, never allowed to speak back or correct lies. I felt like I was the one on trial, instead of him.

'Men like Paul use the court system and Tusla as power tools against the women they want to control and abuse, and believe they only show their dark side when it's too late. Cases like mine are really common but that is ignored because men's rights trump women's and children's rights every time.'

Ms Hanney compared what she described as the 'arrogance' of men she saw at the family court to the 'submissive, frightened faces

of women'.

'I stood there in Dolphin House where the family law courts are in Dublin 2 - and I recognised those arrogant expressions on the men and the submissive frightened faces of women. But the court system never seemed to.

'We [women] are called liars, manipulators, bad mothers. Those things are untrue.'

Ms Hanney said that, wherever she went for help, she was told there was nothing she could do to stop Moody using the court system to control her life.

She added: 'I'm not a lawyer and I'm not a politician but I can see what's wrong and I want to do something about it.

'No matter where I went for help I was told there was nothing I could do to stop Paul controlling me through the courts, nothing I could do to stop this abusive man having access to my child. That is wrong.

'The time has come for me to stand up and do something. I have been to hell and back. I have survived so far but if cancer taught me anything it was how to

fight. I will fight now, for myself and all the women like me.'

Ms Hanney said organisations that support women trapped in terrifying abusive relationships are chronically underfunded.

She recalled how, when she finally summoned the courage to ring Women's Aid, her call was not returned.

### 'I recognised those arrogant expressions'

She told the MoS: 'What supports are in place for women are underfunded and rely on volunteers, so when women need them it's a waiting list or they are simply turned away.'

'When I plucked up the courage to finally ring Women's aid, they never returned my call.

'That's how underfunded these services are. And later on, when I did get to speak with them, terrified, they said

**JAIL:** Paul Moody is serving over three years

they were obliged to tell me the truth... that Paul would have automatic access to my son despite his brutality. I felt they were telling me there was no point in even trying.'

Any time she did try to leave Moody, she was forced to flee with just the 'shirt on my back and my child in my arms'.

Ms Hanney added: 'I had nothing. I had no money. Paul froze my accounts because he was the only one with access to my banking. Most times I ran out without my phone, and on foot without car keys or my bag.

'There is no help for women in these situations, not properly. There is no grant to help you get back on your feet. So the men get back in, because the women have no way to survive. The system of life and the system of law is based on misogyny and the idea that women are not to be trusted.

'That is wrong. In my experience women just want to be loved and supported. The vast majority of women just want peace.'

On July 26, 2022, Moody was jailed for three years and three months for a four-year campaign of harassment using threats, assaults and coercive control against his cancer-stricken ex-partner.

### 'There's no protection for him against that man'

unconditional support from an ex. Facilitating and prioritising abusive men like this has to stop.

'Paul is in prison, something I never dreamed could come true. I have three years now of peace and I will use that time to make a change. I cannot wait to start this fight. I have spoken already to the court and told them how it was for me there as an abused woman.

'If something happens to me, and when Paul gets out I know he will use the courts again. I will not allow that man to destroy my son's chance to grow up with love and kindness and truth.

'He will grow up to be a beautiful person and I want the law to change to protect him. I am so passionate about this and I will not stop.'

The survivor and campaigner also called for legislative changes that would give children access to protective orders against fathers who abuse their mother.

She added: 'Paul has gone to prison for all he has done to me. My son suffered that too, but there is no protection in this country for him against that man.'

'If the law doesn't change and allow children access to protective orders against abusive men, how can we say we are an equal society? We have to change this, we need to protect our children.'

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