

DRUG RELATED INTIMIDATION





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Drug Related Intimidation

Not all families who are living with drug use experience intimidation as a result of drug related debt. Unfortunately, some families do experience intimidation and it can be helpful to have considered this issue and to have some information on it. Sometimes families are targeted to repay a debt that a drug using family member has run up.

How do drug users try to repay the debts?

Initially drug users often try to repay these debts on their own in a variety of ways, for example, full cash payment, cash payment and/or dealing, holding or hiding drugs, violent crime, or sex/prostitution. If drug users cannot repay the debt in this way or if the drug user is sent to prison or enters treatment, sometimes the family can experience intimidation to try to force the family to repay the debt.

What types of intimidation can families experience?

Intimidation can take many forms which can in some cases be quite subtle such as receiving text messages requesting payment, however, other forms of intimidation can be more serious and can include verbal threats, physical violence, damage to home/property, sexual violence or the threat of sexual violence. Most commonly

mothers of drug users, siblings of drug users and fathers of drug users are the targets of intimidation but other family members can also become targets. An intermediary is normally used to collect the debt and not the dealer themselves.

How have families tried to repay drug related debts?

Families have tried to repay debts using a variety of methods; salaries/wages, credit union loan, bank loan, borrowing from friends or family, illegal money lenders, selling personal property, social welfare payments and re-mortgaging the family home.

What is this experience like for families?

Being intimidated is a very frightening experience for families and the levels of violence shown can be quite severe. Different families respond in different ways to this experience, for example, some families repay the debt, some families are unable to repay the debt or refuse to repay the debt, some families are caught in a constant cycle of repaying debts or paying debts for a number of loved ones, and some families decide to report their experience. Intimidation does not always stop after full repayment.

What are the options for families?

The Family Support Network in partnership with the Garda National Drugs Unit has developed a confidential reporting system. If you wish to report an issue of intimidation, please contact your local family support service or the national Family Support Network and they will be able to put you in contact with a Senior Inspector who has knowledge of the issue and can discuss your options with you. At no point will you be forced to enter into a process that you do not wish. Your phone call to any of the agencies listed below will be treated in the strictest of confidence

The Drug Related Intimidation Reporting Programme has been established by the Garda National Drugs Unit and the National Family Support Network. The purpose of this programme is to respond to the needs of drug users and family members who are experiencing drug related intimidation. The experience of intimidation can be very frightening and can pose a serious risk to the individuals involved and their loved ones. Inspectors have been selected by the Garda Commissioner to respond to the issue of drug related intimidation. The nominated Inspector will always be at management level in the force, and will liaise directly with the Superintendent in relation to the case. Individuals experiencing intimidation can make contact with the Inspector for their area for an informal / formal meeting.

It is possible to meet the designated Inspector for an informal discussion concerning intimidation and seek information and advice. It is the decision of the person being intimidated if they want to make a formal complaint or not. If you wish to meet with the Inspector, and are fearful to meet in a Garda station, or to meet with an Inspector in uniform, you may request to meet the Inspector in a neutral venue with the Inspector in plain clothes.

Intimidation is a serious issue with potentially serious consequences. It is important to remember that you do not have to cope alone. Reaching out for confidential, professional, specialized support can help you address the problem situation. Having support at hand is comforting during times of fear, worry and trauma.

The nominated inspectors for the West of Ireland are:

- Detective Inspector Michael Coppinger, Mill Street Garda Station, 091 538000
- Inspector Amanda Gaynor, Castlebar Garda Station, 094 908219
- Detective Inspector Pat Finlay, Roscommon Garda Station, 090 6638300

At an initial meeting Gardaí will:

- Provide practical safety information.
- Provide advice in relation to particular threats or instances of intimidation.
- Provide information on appropriate drug support services for the individual in the family who is accruing drug debts.
- Outline how to make a formal complaint, what is involved, what happens after the complaint is made, and the possible outcomes.

Refer to Information on Support Services section or www.supportme.ie for details on supports available