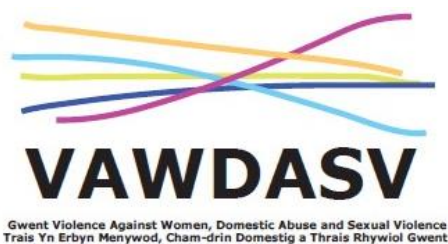


COERCIVE CONTROL: PRACTITIONER GUIDANCE

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AIMS OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document aims to highlight the real dangers and prevalence of coercive control to practitioners across Gwent. It aims to highlight the regulations, legislations and protections that exist around coercive control and what can we do to respond and learn more.



CREATED: APRIL 2021

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**CONTENTS WITHIN THIS DOCUMENT THE FOLLOWING AREAS
WILL BE COVERED:**

WHAT IS COERCIVE CONTROL?

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF COERCIVE CONTROL?

WHO IS AFFECTED BY COERCIVE CONTROL?

WHAT IS THE LAW ON COERCIVE CONTROL?

**WHAT CAN BE DONE TO RESPOND TO THOSE EXPERIENCING COERCIVE
CONTROL?**

**WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS TO HELP AND SUPPORT THOSE
EXPERIENCING COERCIVE CONTROL?**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND CAMPAGINS

****please note that some links will not open in versions of internet explorer but all open with Google
Chrome, Edge or Firefox***

WHAT IS COERCIVE CONTROL?

Controlling behaviours can be portrayed as caring acts with the control being presented as protective and loving. When in reality it is the opposite. It underpins all forms of VAWDASV where the aim is dominate and hold power over another.

Coercive control is an act or a pattern of acts such as assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

This controlling behaviour is designed to make a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive control creates invisible chains and a sense of fear that pervades all elements of a victim's life. It works to limit their human rights by depriving them of their liberty and reducing their ability for action. Experts like Evan Stark liken coercive control to being taken hostage. As he says:

"The victim becomes captive in an unreal world created by the abuser, entrapped in a world of confusion, contradiction and fear."¹

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF COERCIVE CONTROL?

Any behaviour that seeks to limit the choices and the freedoms of another/others displays a need for power and control over that person. The need for this power and control often leads to increasingly dangerous and violent behaviour.

Various research over the last decade by research from, Campbell et al., 2003; Dobash & Dobash, 2015; Myhill, 2015; Stark, 2007 has shown that there is evidence that cases involving "coercive control" are more likely to result in serious harm, including domestic homicide, than cases that involve discrete acts of physical violence²

Because of these risks it is important that consideration of any modified behaviour in the presence of another, or any changes in behaviour because of the influence of another is taken seriously and responded to consistently.

WHO IS AFFECTED BY COERCIVE CONTROL?

Simply put, anyone can be affected by coercive control. We know that it can affect all age groups and can affect both men and women. It is also important to note the significant impact that living with coercive control has on children and young people. (See additional resources). However, we do know that like many other forms of abuse women are disproportionately affected.

There were 24,856 offences of coercive control recorded by the police in England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police (GMP)) in the year ending March 2020. This is an increase

¹ Women's Aid Website <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/coercive-control/>

²[https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0886260516675464#:~:text=There%20is%20evidence%20that%20cases,2015%3B%20Stark%2C%202007\).](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0886260516675464#:~:text=There%20is%20evidence%20that%20cases,2015%3B%20Stark%2C%202007).)

from 16,679 (excluding GMP) in the previous year. For more information on the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour and the criminal justice outcomes for the offence see Prosecution and conviction outcomes.³

We know within Gwent that the occurrences of domestic homicides reveal to us the pervasive and often allusive nature of coercive control. An example from a recent Domestic Adult Practice Review in Gwent follows;

Ann was living with her Partner (Adult B) in the community. Ann had previously had support services from both Health and Social Services Learning Disability Teams. Support Services ceased at Ann's request after moving in with Adult B.

A number of safeguarding reports were submitted in respect of Ann raising concerns about Adult B's aggressive and controlling behaviour. Adult B acted in an obstructive and manipulative manner. He continually spoke for Ann and prevented practitioners from speaking to her and when they did it was very rarely on her own. This lack of access to Ann made it very difficult for practitioners to assess her situation, needs and wishes. Ann had agreed that Adult B could contact the GP surgery on her behalf and all contact from other practitioners was through him.

Adult B was at times verbally hostile, intimidating and abusive to staff from all agencies. He also threatened practitioners with complaints on numerous occasions. There were direct threats made to Social Workers but there was no physical violence.

On several occasions due to a failure to speak to Ann, she was written to and no response was seen as declining assistance. However, at times Adult B demanded all communication be written to him and it was subsequently noted that he controlled all of the mail in the home. There is also doubt, due to her learning disability, as to whether Ann would have been able to understand this written communication. Adult B would also hide letters, so Ann never saw them.

On the occasions Ann was spoken to she was deemed as having capacity to choose to live with Adult B and she declined intervention.

When they first started their relationship Ann would visit her family with Adult B. Over time they reported that contact became more limited and that the visits ceased. Ann's daughter continued to visit her but Adult B made her feel uncomfortable, and would follow her and prevent Ann from leaving the property. This pattern of behaviour meant that contact between Ann and her daughter was reduced to occasional phone calls, and at the point of her hospitalisation Ann had not seen her daughter for 4 years.

³ Office for National Statistics

[https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseandthecriminaljusticesystemenglandandwales/november2020#:~:text=There%20were%2024%2C856%20offences%20of,GMP\)%20in%20the%20previous%20year.](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseandthecriminaljusticesystemenglandandwales/november2020#:~:text=There%20were%2024%2C856%20offences%20of,GMP)%20in%20the%20previous%20year.)

After many years of this relationship continuing and as a result of a safeguarding concern, a joint Police and Social Services visit took place. Adult B was very aggressive towards Local Authority staff and only allowed the Police Officer into the property. The Police Officer briefly met Ann before Adult B became agitated and aggressive and demanded the Police Officer leave the property. Following this further safeguarding measures were discussed and access was then gained under an Adult Protection Support Order (APSO) under the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014. A visit was made by Social Services and the Police. Social Services staff were able speak to Ann to assess her welfare and her wishes. Following a visit from her G.P., later the same day, she agreed to be admitted to hospital. Ann remained in hospital from the date the APSO was served, until she sadly passed away later that month.

WHAT IS THE LAW ON COERCIVE CONTROL?

Unlike other assault crimes, coercive control gives focus to the cumulative effect of coercive and controlling behaviours, focusing on abuse that is routine, ongoing and low level. This can result in the person experiencing it feeling continually afraid, anxious and stressed.

Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 - Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in an Intimate or Family Relationship. Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 created a new offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship. Prior to the introduction of this offence, case law indicated the difficulty in proving a pattern of behaviour amounting to harassment within an intimate relationship (the Statutory Guidance cites the following cases - Curtis [2010] EWCA Crim 123 and Widdows [2011] EWCA Crim 1500).

With the introduction of the Domestic Abuse 2021 Act (UK) changes of emphasis will now take affect and specifically the new Act supports the view that domestic abuse can take many forms. The legal definition now incorporates a range of abuses beyond physical violence, including emotional, coercive or controlling behaviour and economic abuse. The abuse can be behaviour consisting of a single incident or a course of conduct.

The act extends the offence of coercive and controlling behaviour, no longer making it a requirement for abusers and victims to either still be in a relationship or to still live together. There is significant research which shows that those who leave abusive ex-partners can often face sustained or increased controlling or coercive behaviour post-separation. As a consequence, we know that victims are at a heightened risk of homicide during the period immediately following separation.

Further guidance supporting the DA Act will be published in due course and any review of this document will take account of this.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO RESPOND TO THOSE EXPERIENCING COERCIVE CONTROL?

A response to coercive control needs to be as wide and varied as the abuse itself. It needs all services, partners and agencies to have a consistent and timely response to any concerns.

Awareness within all sectors and the public is needed. For the traits and behaviours of coercive control to be widely known and recognised. This needs to be done via training, disseminating information and awareness raising. Please see the following section for more details.

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WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS TO HELP AND SUPPORT THOSE EXPERIENCING COERCIVE CONTROL?

EVIDENCE AND NOTES

Notes and evidence are key when and if a case of coercive control goes through legal proceedings. It is imperative to keep notes even if the client doesn't want to pursue legal action at the time as they may wish to in the future. You can assist in this as a professional by keeping your own record of events and encouraging your client to do the same, safely. A list of helpful evidence can be found here under section 5 <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/controlling-or-coercive-behaviour-intimate-or-family-relationship> .

If you are working with a client who is a perpetrator of coercive control it is also key that you consider guidance under section 7 also. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/controlling-or-coercive-behaviour-intimate-or-family-relationship> It is also key to remember that there are specific services for perpetrators to offering support and help with reflecting on their behaviour.

TRAINING

The complexities surrounding coercive control are vast and varied. We would always recommend accessing additional training to enhance your awareness and knowledge and to provide you with additional tools to recognise coercive control and how to effectively respond.

Understanding Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control is a great start to your learning on this topic. Training on understanding Perpetrators will also enable you to gain knowledge on perpetrator patterns and behaviours to support early identification of concerning behaviours. In addition to these, if you are in a forward-facing role where you work directly with people who may be victims or perpetrators of any form of VAWDASV then Ask and Act Group 2 training will also help you to know how to ask sensitive and direct questions around VAWDASV and respond effectively to any disclosures.

As a minimum we would recommend you access the following training to support your awareness and understanding of coercive control.

- Understanding DA and Coercive Control
- Understanding Risk and MARAC
- Ask and Act Group 2

All dates for these training sessions can be found by visiting the following; [Courses - Gwent Safeguarding](#)

SUPPORT SERVICES

When working with anyone who is experiencing Coercive Control, it is important to remember that you are not expected to be an expert, but to know that there are experts in this field who can work to support you and your client to get the wide range of support that they may need.

Please visit the following for a link to a wide directory of services: [Support Services - Gwent Safeguarding](#)

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND CAMPAIGNS

WARNING – before watching these videos and resources there may be content that could be triggering for some and so please watch or share with caution.

- This video made my Scottish Women's Aid also provides a helpful overview.
<https://youtu.be/36mQFefBylM>
 - In this video, Professor Evan Stark, forensic social worker and author of 'Coercive Control' talks to Welsh Women's Aid about how he's discovered controlling behaviour affects children and young people <https://youtu.be/kvHbVzTzpX0>
 - Leslie Morgan Steiner was in "crazy love" -- that is, madly in love with a man who routinely abused her and threatened her life.
https://www.ted.com/talks/leslie_morgan_steiner_why_domestic_violence_victims_don_t_leave?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare
 - What Social Worker's Need to Know About Coercive Control
[What Social Worker Need to Know About Coercive Control - YouTube](#)
 - This is not Love, this is Control Welsh Government Campaign.
[This is control | GOV.WALES](#)
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