

Police Responses to Coercive Control

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With thanks to Merseyside Police and Women's Aid

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Context

- Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 introduced the gender-neutral offence of coercive and controlling behaviour in England and Wales
- Upheld for criminalising emotional & psychological abuse, and recognising the everyday realities of domestic abuse victims, and significant harm these forms of abuse can cause (e.g. Stark 2007).

HOWEVER

- By 2016, there had been just 27 convictions for coercive and controlling behaviour, with only 24 sentences of immediate custody
- Bureau of Investigative Journalism 24/11/17 reported patchy implementation and poor understanding of the new legislation (based on Freedom of Information requests)

Aims

- To analyse police responses to and actions taken in coercive control and domestic abuse cases
- To identify possible missed opportunities for the application of coercive control
- To use project findings to develop a coercive control ‘learning tool’

What we did

- **Stage 1:** Quantitative analysis of Merseyside Police domestic abuse data (January 2016- June 2017)
- **Stage 2:** Qualitative analysis of all coercive control cases (156) and a random sample of ABH domestic abuse cases.
- **Stage 3:** Development of a ‘coercive control learning tool’
 - ‘Making Sense of Coercive Control’ Conference, 27th June 2018, Lancaster University

Headline findings

- 95% victims of coercive control were women
- Only 156 of 18,978 crimed domestic abuse cases were recorded as coercive control

	Coercive control	ABH	Sig. level
Attendance within 10 minutes	17.9%	61.9%	***
Risk assessment Gold	42.9%	27.6%	***
% Arrest	46.8%	71.9%	***
% Solved	16.0%	32.9%	***

NS $p > 0.05$
 * $P \leq 0.05$
 ** $P \leq 0.01$
 *** $P \leq 0.001$

Coercive Control and ABH Cases

- Range of behaviours in coercive control cases that were not previously offences, but others that were...
- Coercive Control- 63% featured physical violence
- ABH- 87% intimate partner also featured evidence of coercive control
- Missed opportunities for identifying coercive control in ABH cases
- Domestic abuse is responded to differently, despite similar behaviours being present

Criming

- Typically victims did not engage with police to report coercive control
- Sometimes officers did not recognise coercive control/investigated entirely different offence

Response and Investigation

- Officers struggled to evidence patterned behaviour
- Delays in response, lengthy investigations
- ‘One word against the other’
- Other Evidential Opportunities Missed

Outcomes

- Few prosecutions and fewer convictions
- Admission of guilt and/ or previous DV convictions
- Physical evidence: trackers, criminal damage, injuries
- NOT unique to Merseyside!

Coercive Control Learning Tool

- Used as a face-to-face training aid and/ or...
- Resource available to police and other agencies at any time
 - Certain aspects of the tool have been designed so they can be printed off
- Mixture of written content, visuals, audio recordings, case studies and activities
- Input from survivors of domestic abuse, Merseyside Police, CPS, Women's Aid practitioners and Lancaster University academics.
- Three sections: Understanding coercive control, responding to coercive control, investigating and evidencing coercive control
- COP confirmed meetings their DA Learning Outcomes

Impact

- National and international interest in the tool
- Training ongoing/ completed: Merseyside Police and partners, Cumbria Adult and Child Safeguarding, IOPC, Northumbria Police
- Project cited as part of Home Affairs Select Committee for Domestic Abuse, Domestic Abuse Draft Consultation and UN CEDAW Executive Summary.
- Invited to present project findings in Danish Parliament, advised on development of Psychological Violence legislation
- Engagement- BBC Woman's Hour, Conversation

Moving Forwards

- Awarded further N8 PRP funding to support the dissemination of the Learning Tool and an evaluation of its use at Merseyside Police (June onwards)
- Presented learning tool at National Domestic Abuse Stakeholder meeting (2019)- hoping for the tool to be disseminated widely
- Further research exploring responses to domestic abuse, particularly coercive control

Thank you for listening

Any questions?