Police Responses to Coercive Control

Dr Charlotte Barlow, Professor Sandra Walklate & Dr Kelly Johnson, Dr Les Humphreys, Professor Stuart Kirby
With thanks to Merseyside Police and Women’s Aid

c.barlow@lancaster.ac.uk
@charlottebarl88
Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 introduced the gender-neutral offence of coercive and controlling behaviour in England and Wales. This is 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. The 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coercive control</th>
<th>ABH</th>
<th>Sig. level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance within 10 minutes</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk assessment Gold</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Arrest</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>71.9%</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Solved</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
• 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, Nortumbria 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?