



REGROUPEMENT DES MAISONS
POUR FEMMES VICTIMES
DE VIOLENCE CONJUGALE

Tool 1



Understanding

Coercive control

(Short version)



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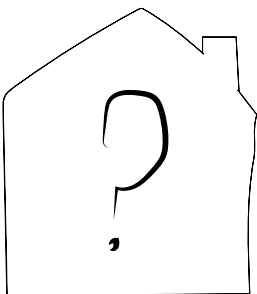
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In addition to this toolbox, the Regroupement provides training on coercive control for social/legal professionals. [Contact us](#) for more details on the proposed modules and modalities.

A – A broader understanding of conjugal violence

Although physical violence and femicide are universally condemned, behaviours that involve non-physical violence in relationships are still too often normalized, downplayed and even romanticized.

The concept of coercive control underscores the need to address domestic violence in its most common, banal, invisible form.



B – What is coercive control?

Coercive control refers to an ongoing continuum of violence, exploitation, humiliation and manipulation committed by abusers to establish and maintain dominance over their victims and continuously deprive them of their rights.

- It is an insidious and progressive takeover of the victim, which does not necessarily depend on the infliction of blows or bruises.
- This pattern of behaviour is designed to make victims dependent by isolating them from support, depriving them of their independence, and regulating their behaviours through daily micro rules.

Coercive control and dangerousness



Intensification of control in the context of separation

Leaving an abusive partner can be extremely dangerous.

67% of domestic homicides occurred while the couple was separated or separating.¹



The presence of coercive control is an important indicator of lethality.

An Australian study of domestic homicides in 2019 found that all cases involved the pre-existence of coercive control.²

In over 40% of homicides by men who had exercised coercive control over their partners, no physical violence had been reported in the year before they killed their partner.³

¹ Domestic Violence Death Review Committee 2018 Annual Report, Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario [<https://www.ontario.ca/document/domestic-violence-death-review-committee-2018-annual-report>].

² A. H. Johnson et al., Ontario, *Feminist Criminology* 2019, vol. 14(1) 3-23 [<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1557085117701574>].

³ *Ibid.*

C – Impacts on women victims and their children

1. Impacts more devastating than those of physical violence

Women—and their children— who experience coercive control report that the cumulative effect of control, threats, harassment and isolation is often more devastating than physical abuse and as difficult to recover from.

Coercive control has the effect of eliminating victims' sense of individuality and preventing them from believing in their own ability to make decisions. They no longer make decisions based on what is best for them, but based on the fear of what the other person will do to them if they don't make the "right" decision.

Here is what victims tell us:⁴

- ☞ I have the impression I'm constantly walking on eggshells, in a state of hypervigilance.
- ☞ The fear is always there, in the pit of my stomach. I am afraid of what might happen to me or my loved ones.
- ☞ I don't do the things I used to do. I don't remember the last time I went out with my girlfriends.
- ☞ I have no money of my own, no bank account.
- ☞ I feel like I'm going crazy, I doubt myself all the time, my feelings, my opinions, I don't recognize myself anymore.
- ☞ I'm ashamed, I'm afraid to talk about it to anyone and I feel guilty.
- ☞ He constantly puts me down in my role as a mother, my appearance, my clothes, my way of cooking, my way of educating my children, etc.

⁴ This list was drawn from the following tools [our translation]:

– CAVAC brochure *Parlez-en – Les réactions et les conséquences de la victimisation* (undated)

[https://cavac.gc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/d.cavac_parlez-en_fr2019.pdf]

– Safe Ireland brochure *Help make her world BIGGER again – A quick guide to the criminal offence of coercive control* (undated) [<https://www.safeireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/Safe-Ireland-Coercive-Control-Leaflet.pdf>].

2. Growing up in a climate of tension and fear

For a long time, children were viewed as “witnesses” to conjugal violence. Today we recognize that they are also victims.

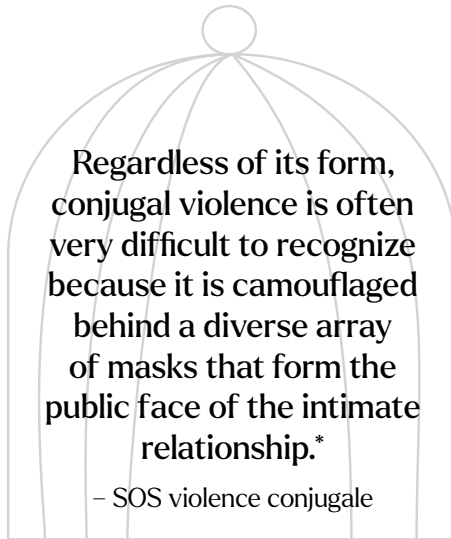
Here are some examples of controlling and coercive behaviours that have major impacts on children. The abuser:

- Physically abuses the child/children, or kidnaps or endangers them in order to intimidate, threaten or punish the mother
- Prevents or controls children's activities and reduces their time with their mother and grandparents
- Monitors them
- Forces children to participate in the abusive assaults on their mother
- Instrumentalizes them by asking them to monitor their mother's activities, send threatening messages or harass her
- Limits resources so that the mother cannot meet their needs
- Prevents the mother from comforting and caring for them; and
- Belittles their mother in front of them, etc.⁵



⁵ Some examples have been drawn from *Children experiencing interparental coercive control*, Dr. Lauren Smith, Iriss, Scotland, 2018 [<https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines/coercive-control/>].

D – Manifestations and patterns of behaviour



* [our translation]

These patterns of behaviour are progressive, cumulative and often perpetuated over a long period of time. They do not stop at the moment of separation. On the contrary, they tend to intensify as soon as the violent man feels that he is losing his grip on his partner or ex-partner.



Examples of controlling and coercive behaviour⁶

- Constantly criticizing: the way his partner or ex-partner takes care of the children, her clothes, her cooking, etc.
- Repeatedly humiliating her in front of witnesses, belittling her
- Jealous or possessive behaviour, such as incessant phone calls to check on the victim's whereabouts and activities, or checking on the victim's phone or social networks
- Controlling family finances or restricting victim's access to a bank card
- Isolating the victim by preventing her from visiting friends and family
- Dictating the victim's routine or schedule, for example, by imposing schedules for going to school or shopping
- Preventing the victim from working outside the home or monitoring her at work
- Restricting access to communications, such as the telephone or computer
- Changing behaviour when the police arrive in order to create fear in the victim of not being believed
- Devious use of legal proceedings to control, harass, intimidate, coerce and drain the victim's financial and emotional resources
- Hindering the victimized parent's post-separation decisions and ability to act as a parent

The "Manifestations of Coercive Control" tool provides a detailed overview of the main manifestations of coercive control with examples from real-life situations.⁷

⁶ Adapted from "Context and dynamics of domestic abuse." College of Policing UK, undated [<https://www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/domestic-abuse/context-and-dynamics-domestic-abuse>].

⁷ These examples are taken from various sources on the Internet and from different tools, the main ones being:

– guide from the Carrefour familial des personnes handicapées "Femmes handicap violence conjugale" (HVC)

[http://www.cfph.org/_guide-hvc-2021/guide-hvc.pdf]

– chart produced by the West Island Women's Shelter "Coercive Control Screening Questionnaire and Evaluation Grid"

[<https://wiws.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Outils-Complementaires-English-v4.pdf>].

– PEVC evaluation tool concerning children in a conjugal violence setting (Protection des enfants en contexte de violence conjugale [<https://pevc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Outil-evaluation.pdf>]).

E – Towards a paradigm shift in judicial intervention in conjugal violence

From

Vision of conjugal violence focused on **visible physical violence**



To

Vision focused on **the range of invisible strategies** for taking control of the victim (social isolation, economic control, micro-regulation of daily life)

Search for **isolated episodes or incidents**, without linking them to each other



Search for **ongoing and cumulative patterns of behaviour (history)**

Focus on the **victim's reactions or lack thereof**



Focus on the **perpetrator, his actions and underlying intentions**



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