

Coercive Control Response

Presentation from:

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To:

Joint Select Committee Inquiry into Coercive Control

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I wish to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging.

I am the General Manager at Domestic Violence Service Management (which I will refer to as DVSM) and we are a small specialist domestic and family violence not for profit that supports women and their children. We provide outreach supports and refuge accommodation in Sydney and remote NSW.

In this financial year to date, we have supported 1,077 women and children. Each of these women's situations are complex and interact with multiple systems. **Coercive control is in every DFV case we support.**

DVSM thanks the Joint Select Committee for the opportunity to share our experiences in front-line service delivery.

We work closely with Insight Exchange and we wish to table two Insight Exchange resources which may assist when considering cultural change, training and implementation - Follow My Lead and My Safety Kit. Both resources we use regularly and are recommended in the NSW Domestic Violence Death Review 2017-2019 Recommendation 8.

DVSM stresses that a specific offence of coercive control **must** be considered within a broader framework of intersecting system changes to ensure its intention can be effectively applied. Education & training is essential to all frontline responders such as Police, magistrates, health care workers, educators, child protection services, and **in addition to comprehensive community education.** We would urge time is taken to consider changes and implementation to minimize any unintended consequences.

We need to understand and be tuned in to victims' resistance to violence and how women navigate their safety. This assists our understanding and recognition of the patterns and history of abuse. This provides a broader scope for accuracy and evidence gathering of the situation the victim is experiencing. It also ensures victims are not mis-identified as the perpetrators of the situation.

Many victims do not want to see the perpetrator go to jail; they just want the abuse to stop. A coercive control offence provides an additional option for victims and most importantly, **legitimises the experiences of victims and acknowledges what is happening to victims is a crime.**

It is **critical** to have voices of lived experience at the table and included in the assessment, co-design and implementation of any potential changes.

It is **imperative** that the voices of all marginalised groups are also heard and considered - including Aboriginal women, children & young people, women with disabilities and women on temporary visas.

We all need a **national** broad definition of domestic abuse to ensure consistency of approach, understanding and legislation.

The impacts on children and young people directly and indirectly experiencing coercive control within the family is damaging, long lasting and **often goes unheard.**

I just like to advise a trigger warning before I share this story.

Jane is 16 years, in Year 12 and a bright student planning to go to University.

Jane is experiencing high levels of stress resulting from the physical and verbal abuse directed towards herself, her mother, and sister over a prolonged period from the father.

Jane is experiencing ongoing harassment, manipulation, and intimidation from the father (as does the mother post separation). Some of Jane's experiences include:

- continual derogatory remarks about her.
- her possessions stolen to finance his gambling activities.
- threats of self-harm by the father.
- constant calling & texts from the father. - Jane shared being in class and receiving 45 texts from her father with photos of her mother in the community.
- Terrible Mistruths being spread about the family to friends and the school community to isolate them.
- being punched in the back of the head and dragged to the floor by her father.
- And attempts to burn her.
- Jane also recognises the father is applying similar psychological abuse and manipulation to her younger sister aged 9 years.

Jane first started experiencing mental health issues, including an attempt of self-harm 4 years ago, at which time she was brought to the attention of State services.

Last year Jane experienced the feeling of not being able to breathe which coincided with escalations of her father's controlling behaviors.

This led to 2 overnight hospitalisations for Jane.

2 child protection reports of psychological abuse due to father's influence, and pressure to influence the mother had been submitted. A further 3rd child protection report with regard to the younger sister followed. To our knowledge, there have been no outcomes from these reports.

Jane has reported her fears and experiences to her school, and she is known to the school psychologist. Her studies have been impacted. Jane is currently undertaking specialist youth counselling.

Additional security has been added to the home after the father stole a key from the youngest child, let himself in, hid in the laundry and later proceeded to threaten and then swallow bleach.

Jane has advocated for her mother's safety and intervention with services and Police when the mother has felt unable to do so. There is a current ADVO in place for the mother or the primary victim, with no specific mention of children. The Police advised DVSM that adding children to the ADVO was not necessary as it was psychological abuse.

We share this example from Jane's perspective to highlight the importance that coercive control **is just as damaging to young people in families as it is to the mother**; and that any changes of domestic abuse and coercive control definitions **must** recognise the children and young people in these family units.

In addition, this case highlights a **disconnected system** in that, although Jane and her mother came to the attention of **several** authorities over many years – coercive control remains present in their lives and continues to have an ongoing damaging effect.

Thank you.