



UNIVERSITY of  
STIRLING



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# WELCOME TO OUR FIRST DOMESTIC ABUSE SEMINAR!

Centre for Child Wellbeing and  
Protection

*10 December 2018*

BE THE DIFFERENCE

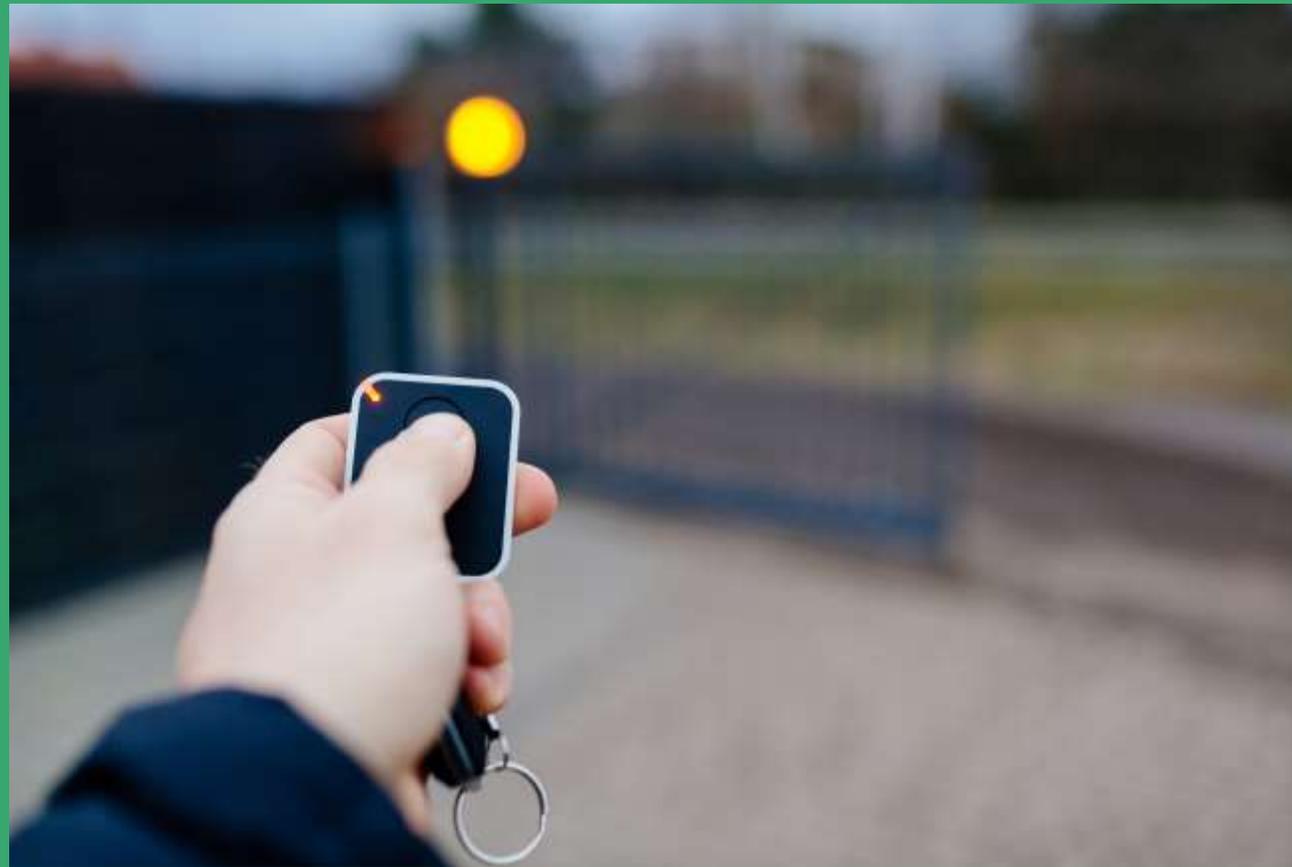
# REMEMBER

These seminars are yours – please tell us what you want to explore

Do give us constructive feedback

Do talk back





# UNDERSTANDING COERCIVE CONTROL AND ITS IMPACT IN FAMILIES

# Domestic abuse includes any behaviour in an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship (WHO)

## Physical violence

- slapping, hitting, kicking and beating.

## Emotional abuse

- Emotional (psychological) abuse, such as insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation (e.g. destroying things), threats of harm, threats to take away children

## DOMESTIC ABUSE

## Controlling behaviours

- Controlling behaviours, including isolating a person from family and friends; monitoring their movements; and restricting access to financial resources, employment, education or medical care.

## Sexual abuse

- Forced sexual intercourse
- Other forms of sexual coercion.
- Reproductive control

# What is coercive control?

“reducing the spouse’s power to make decisions, limitations of the spouse’s relationships with others and independence in daily activities, and diminution of his or her self-image and ego strength” (Ehrensaft et al, 1999, p. 21).

Stark (2012) coercive control leads to “ . . . a hostage-like condition of entrapment that arises from the suppression of a victim’s autonomy, rights and liberties

Beyond the physical incident model associated with domestic *violence*

It is not a single event, but a pattern of coercion, control and exertion of power.

Secures compliance with the victim’s own oppression

Functions like a capture crime, but without the overt, visible capture.

“Because the “protect and punish” strategy of the domestic violence model does not attack the structural roots of women’s vulnerability to abuse, violence against women remains epidemic.”  
(Libel and Parekh 2009)

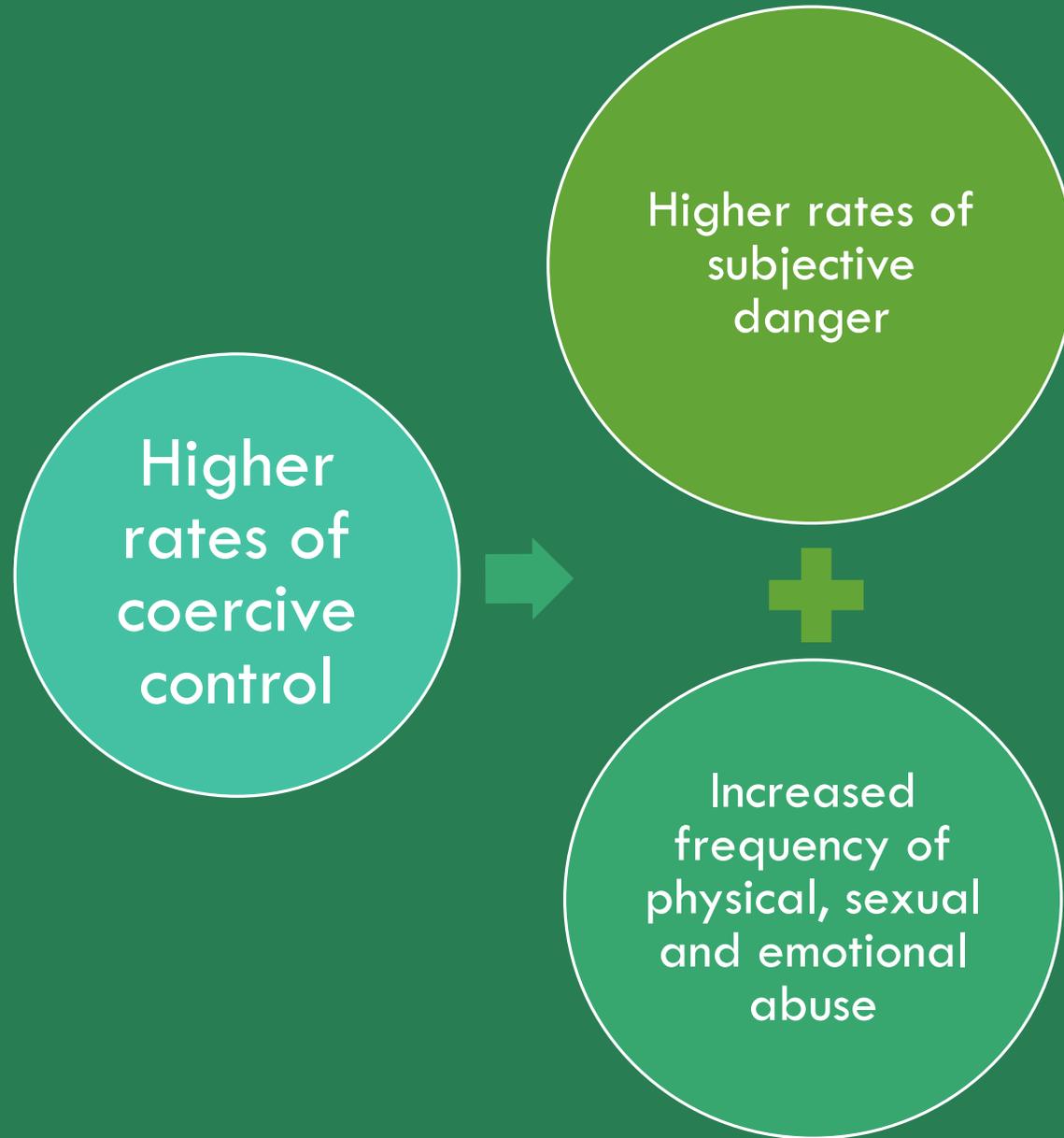
Women frequently tell us violence wasn’t “the worst part”

Coercive control as a framework helps professionals respond without erasing ‘the worst part’ of the experience – control, humiliation, threat, degradation as the scene setting context against which physical acts are enabled

# BEHAVIOURS ASSOCIATED WITH COERCIVE CONTROL

isolation	Deprivation of basic needs	Monitoring time	Use of online / tech to monitor	Control of the everyday
Depriving access to support services	Putting them down	Humiliation, degradation, dehumanization	Rigid rules	Coerced involvement in criminal behavior
Coerced neglect / abuse	Financial abuse	Threats to victim	Threats to children / others	Threats to expose / out the victim
Criminal damage	Sexual coercion and rape	Blocking access to transport	Reproductive control	

Coercive control is associated with greater risk



**Table 3.** Percentage of Women Experiencing Physical Violence by the Current Partner in the FRA Survey, by Intensity of Violence and Partner's Controlling Behavior.

	Intensity of Physical Violence			Total
	No Violence	Less Severe Violence	More Severe Violence	
Intensity of control by the current partner				
None	99	1	0	100
Moderate	84	14	2	100
High	45	32	23	100
Total	93	5	2	100

Source. FRA Violence Against Women Survey dataset, 2012.

Note. FRA = European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

Table 3. Percentage of Women Experiencing Physical Violence by the Current Partner in the FRA Survey, by Intensity of Violence and Partner's Controlling Behavior.

# COERCIVE CONTROL IS PRESENT IF BEHAVIOUR IS

Continuously / consistently present

It has a serious effect on the victim

The perpetrator knows / ought to know the impact of behaviour

There is a personal connection between the victim and perpetrator

Can occur with or without violence (Crossman 2017)

coercive control is experienced primarily by women  
more harmful than other forms of domestic violence

Myhill, 2018

Extends the experience of domestic abuse beyond separation (Broughton 2016)

Enables ongoing impact on wellbeing and mental health

Intersections with other gendered forms of control (e.g. forced marriage) (Chantler and McCarry, 2016)

Understanding coercive control can help us differentiate domestic abuse and 'situational couple violence', challenging the discourse of 'gender symmetry' in domestic abuse (Nevala 2017)

# ACTIVITY: HOW COULD A VICTIM EVIDENCE COERCIVE CONTROL?

# THINKING INTERSECTIONALLY ABOUT ABUSE AND CONTROL

Gender

Race

Class

Disability

Sexuality

Gender identity

# DISABILITIES AND COERCIVE CONTROL

People with disabilities already more likely to experience isolation and potential vulnerability

Implications for domestic abuse and coercive control.

# CARE OR CONTROL (THIARA)

“I had an adapted motability car, he would take it and disappear for days on end with it, leaving me stranded in the house...”

“One time he actually took the battery out of this wheelchair I’m in now... I couldn’t move, and if it wasn’t for a mutual friend that came to the house, he wouldn’t have plugged it back in. And I don’t know how long I’d have been staying there with a dead battery.”

“He’d insult me with all those names, you ‘spassy’ and so on, who’d want to marry you, just look at you... Shouting insults, you cripple, all that sort of thing. Once when he was furious he threw me on the floor with my dinner and said that’s where you eat your dinner, that’s where you belong. Of course I couldn’t get up again”

“At night times, he’d be in the living room and I’d be in my bedroom and he’d shut the door on me so I couldn’t call him for anything, so he wouldn’t hear me. And if I wanted to like use the toilet or anything, he’d tell me to just piss myself there and then.”

# CARING HEROES

“I didn’t notice it... he loved doing things for me... I’d never been taken care of properly... it was all about caring and it was subtle. It was so subtle I didn’t notice it until it had got to a degree of critical.... I was in the process of getting (my daughter) back. I noticed through social services that they left me alone because he was around.”

“People pity him because he is taking care of you. And people are reluctant to criticise this saint or to think he could be doing these terrible things. And possibly as well ... people don’t really ‘see’ a disabled woman as a wife, partner, mother. So I think for some people, it’s hard to think well this might be a woman who’s being sexually or physically abused by her partner, is experiencing domestic violence, because disabled women don’t have sex, do they...?”

# FINANCIAL ABUSE AND DISABILITY

Family carers and paid carers

# MEN AS VICTIMS

When domestic violence occurs to men, the most frequent perpetrator is another man (ONS, 2017)

Often remains a gendered crime, with masculinity being particularly targeted for abuse

The challenges of “negotiating a victim identity; they portray themselves by careful positioning as both victims and strong, active young men.” (Burcar and Akerstrom, 2009)

Male helpseeking impacted by service target perception, shame and embarrassment, denial, stigmatization, and fear (Tsui et al, 2010)

# INDICES OF CONTROL IN MALE VICTIMISATION

Fear of IPV, maintaining power and control, victimization as a forbidden narrative, critical understanding of IPV, and breaking the silence (Brooks et al, 2017)

She was hitting me up in the face area . . . with her fists and like I said, she's not weak. I think that's a misconception with a lot of guys . . . I've notice that they think women are weak and there are a lot of tough women out there, a lot of them. She cracked me in the jaw and she cracked me in the ribs. I still got really bad ribs because she hit me, like three times, and I wouldn't lift my hands to defend myself like that. I wanted to . . . if it was a guy it's a different situation, you can defend yourself . . . so I kept on taking these hits.

# ASSERTING CONTROL

No . . . never . . . I just took the shots and then I just told her straight. I said you're not going to get me down . . . down as a person . . . who I am.

So she was being . . . ignoring me, but obviously her temper was mounting and I started forcing my way into my own bed . . . “this is my house,” yelling, bla bla bla. So, of course, I pushed and I pushed and I pushed until something broke . . . and then, all of a sudden, probably I was still too much in her face, I was mad, too. She grabbed whatever she could get her hands on to get me away from her. It happened to be a very large knife. Even when it was happening, I wasn't like “oh my God, I'm gonna die.” It was “what the hell, get that”; it was a struggling match.

I just let her dig her claws into me, I didn't even fight back. I just want to see my kids . . . living with a person like that, you feel so defeated every damned day you're there. After a while you don't even feel like a man, you just feel like . . . I used to make jokes with my friends, “I think my old lady let me wear the pants today.” It's a sad reality, some people just take it too far, the abuse . . . I just feel like a fraction of who I was at one point because of the relationship.

# COERCIVE CONTROL IN LGBTQ COUPLES

Equal rates to heterosexual couples

Emotional abuse as a common feature of domestic abuse (Toro Alfonso, Rodriguez Madera, 2004)

Stigma and discrimination as disincentive to reporting, and as feature of the abuse (Calton et al, 2015)

After multiple stabbings...

My counselor said that I deserve . . . a big honking trophy, for being one of the most truly courageous men for never rising up against her like that, and never raising a hand, but always making sure that she was safe and protecting her when she was having her little temper tantrum, leading up to these events, and then still caring about her the way I do, even though my safety was . . . those are the kinds of things that I think make a real man, and these guys will never understand that

# VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN AS A HIDDEN NARRATIVE

That's how it is in the real world. A man is ashamed to talk about being abused by a woman . . . I was kind of ashamed to talk about it; what the hell kind of a man are you? That's the hardest thing for a man to come forward and say "I was being abused by this woman."

That's when I actually had tears in my eyes and I lifted up my shirt and I showed them. I said "if she was to come back, you'd see, she doesn't have a mark on her. I haven't raised a hand to her." "Well, have you raised your voice?" "Well, yeah of course I have, in defense. I'm scared, what am I supposed to do? Sit in the corner and take a beating every night?" . . . but it's not like I sat there and screamed at her on a regular basis, I never did. I always tried to keep things very calm, at a good level.

# POLICING COERCIVE CONTROL

Risk assessment data – coercive control most common form of DV

Force data suggests police in England / Wales have considerable discretion in response to DVA and coercive control

Presumptive arrest vs police judgement – often prepared to ignore policy if they feel an incident is not serious

Still a general judgement that ‘serious’ = significant physical incident.

Myhill 2018

# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF COERCIVE CONTROL

# DISCUSS AND TAKE NOTES...

In your work, how do you come into contact with children experiencing domestic abuse?

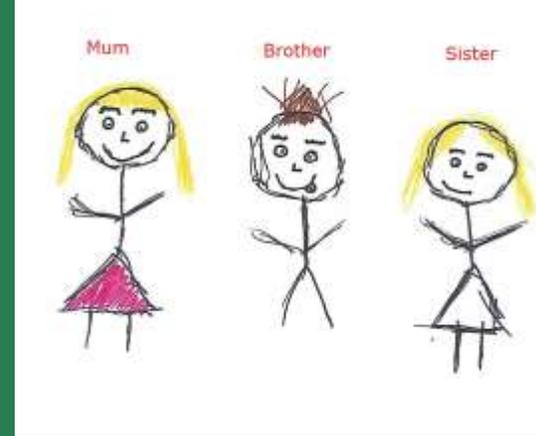
How do you feel about talking to children about their experiences of domestic abuse?

What words / questions do you use / might you use to ask children about their experiences of domestic abuse?

What worries you about talking to children about domestic abuse?

Move tables, reflect on other group's worries – any solutions?

# HEARING CHILDREN'S VOICES



It is important to hear children's experiences from their point of view

Our policy context effectively erases children by positioning them as 'witnesses' (Callaghan, Alexander, Fellin and Sixsmith, 2016)

Coercive control legislation – children still not 'victims'

We have laws and policies that see the family as broken in pieces, rather than understanding it as a whole unit (Callaghan, Fellin, Alexander, Mavrou, Papathanassiou, 2016)

This has implications for practice

We need policy that positions children as equal victims in domestic violence – not as secondary 'impacted' persons, or witnesses

# READ THROUGH THE EXTRACTS — CAN YOU IDENTIFY WHICH VICTIM IS A CHILD, AND WHICH AN ADULT?

## *Extract 1*

So this one had the balcony door and he could climb over there, so that he could get in easily there. Outdoors had alarms on, our windows had alarms on, because the police came and fitted them. So if he tried to break in, the alarm would go off. ... We didn't have them before, but because the windows kept getting smashed in and forced in, we had alarms put in. We thought the balcony door was safe, but after that we put an alarm in. ... He used to smash the windows, and we could hear it from the bedroom. So that was very frightening

## *Extract 2*

We've put a phone in and I take my mobile to bed every night. We keep all the inside doors wide open so we can hear all through the house and I sometimes just don't sleep anyway. It comes in fits and starts. I have panic attacks.... All our doors have got bolts on and clip-ons, and locks and bolts and more bolts and all our windows are nailed shut.

## *Extract 3*

I'd always hesitate in what I would say. Even if I said "Hello", I'd always think before, is he just going to shut me out? Is he going to respond in a nice way, or be angry? I'd always think ahead, and plan what I was saying.

# CHILDREN CAN ARTICULATE THEIR EXPERIENCES

*Elda(17, Italy): I felt helpless, passive and fragile*

*Int: What made you feel that way?*

*Elda: My age*

*Int: Why?*

*Elda: It is a constraint. No one listens to you if you're a little girl*

Children are not inarticulate – they are silenced

children are articulate, strategic and reflexive communicators

good support for families struggling with domestic violence must enable space for children's voice to be heard

When responding to families we must take into account multiple layers and perspectives rather than privileging the adult one.

# CHILDREN RECOGNISE COERCIVE CONTROL

*Oliver: ((erm)) I think it was because my mum wanted to go out with her friends, and he didn't want her to go out and all that ((.)) and started like throwing stuff and saying "You're not going to go ((.)) and you need to help" and I dunno, "help clean and make the food"*

*Dylan: Because things would just get escalated ((.)) like if he knew what she was doing all the time, he could control like, everything, he would try to like, do stuff to scare us and I, I dunno, but I dunno what he would do, it's just he wants to know like what's going on so he just knows like*

# CHILDREN EXPERIENCE COERCIVE CONTROL

*Jess: If you touched the newspaper before he read it you were grounded.*

# POST SEPARATION COERCIVE CONTROL

*Alison: Yeah, he spent three years, and then we went to this court thing and then, he got this thing to say that he can see us kids, but ((.)), he's been messing my mum about, first he goes like "yeah it'll be on a Thursday after school for a couple of hours", so we could still go to our Nan's for Sunday dinner, so now we hardly see my Nan, and then, like he's changed it to wanting the whole of Sunday ((.)) 'cause he was busy on a Saturday. Mum's like "No", but she had to do 'cause he, he went to court again.*

*Oliver: The first thing was he drove past ... and then I looked on the road and I actually saw him, I was like "What?!" And then I kept walking and he was saying my name, and then he went down, then went to the zebra crossing, turned around and then it was alright 'cause I knew some older people that were behind me, but anyway, he just like, he just like, put his like, two five pounds like that to me ((demonstrates how his dad held out money for him)) and then he didn't say anything, and then I just walked on but took it and walked on, and then he just turned around and went back ((.)) he went.*

# CHILDREN MANAGE COERCIVE CONTROL: CONSTRAINT AS RESPONSE TO COERCIVE CONTROL

*Int: When you knew that your step-dad was coming round, did it feel different then?*

*Sophia: Yeah.*

*Int: What did it feel like then?*

*Sophia: Like "Oh no, I've got to keep my mouth shut and I can't say anything".*

*Int: So you were scared about going home and when you were actually there, what was it like?*

*Rachel: I went straight upstairs to my bedroom, ((umm)) I'd sort of like sneak downstairs and check that no one was arguing or anything and if it was all OK, I'd come downstairs and sit down ((umm)) ((.)) and watch TV with my brother ((umm)) but if there was an argument I'd run downstairs, grab my brother and take him upstairs.*

*Lizzy: Yeah, it was, it was like, ((erm)) you didn't really wanna go outside 'cause like, every time you did you were like, is that him? Is that him? And you just, even like now, when I go in the car park and it's dark 'cause I'm taking the rubbish out, it's still like, is he still there? Or is someone there watching us or something?*

*Int: So you're checking all the time?*

*Lizzy: Yeah.*

# ABUSIVE PARTNERS DO ATTEMPT TO ENROL CHILDREN IN ABUSIVE CONTROL

*Ben (8) Well, my mum met this nice guy, well ((.)) he seemed nice, but as he went through our lives, as we started, as we started to like him, ((.)) we didn't actually know that he was a really bad person , so my mum ((.)) for some reason my mum got into this massive argument with him and then ((.)) he was, when I was there he started telling me that if I, if we went to court I was meant to tell the judge that mum, my mum was being a bad person and ((.))*

# THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF COERCIVE CONTROL

*Emma: Like obviously when I was little I'd hide away from him, yeah, but as you get older you can't hide from that kind of thing, like if it's in your head you physically can't hide from it. I mean you can try and forget but that makes it worse ((.)) 'cause it bottles up and then you've just, and when it does bottle up too much it just, everything just explodes in you and like, oh my God, why did this happen? And then you start thinking, oh if only I wasn't alive this wouldn't have happened, if I wasn't born this wouldn't have happened, that kind of thing.*

# CHILDREN ACT WHEN COERCIVE CONTROL OCCURS

*Lizzy: Yeah, I went to the neighbours and asked them to ring the police and, yeah, I was only about seven so*

*Int: And did they do that?*

*Lizzy: Yeah, the police came and my nan came and she came and picked us up and took us to her, her house.*

*Int: Did you used to send her texts?*

*Paul: Yeah*

*Int: Were you allowed to do that?*

*Paul: Yeah. ... Sometimes. Cause like sometimes I sended a text. Like upstairs. I missed my mum!*

*I used to say in the text "I hate my life". Cause I never got to see my mum.*

*Int: And you found ways like that of telling her that you missed her.*

# CHILDREN RESIST COERCIVE CONTROL

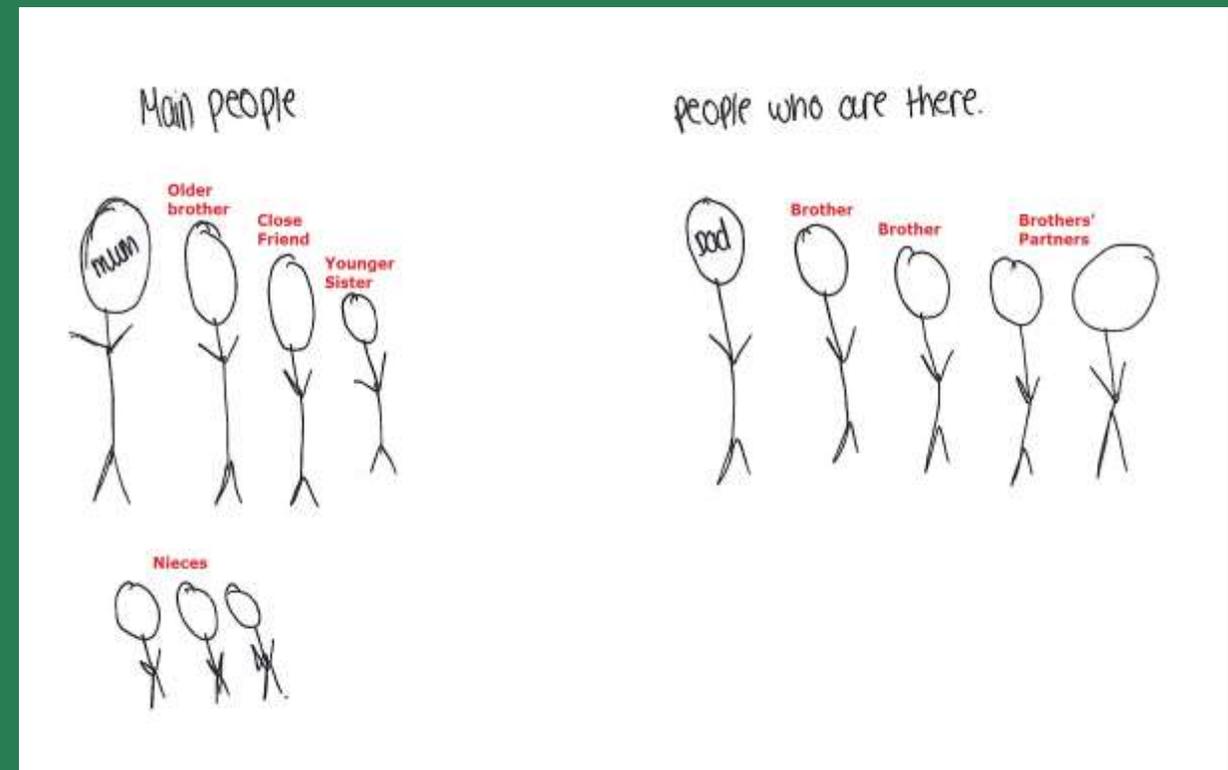
*Mark: [...] when my mum gets money he takes it off her, so I say, I don't say anything, she don't get no money.... I mean like when she gets money out of the bank my dad takes it off her. So I have to lie to him.*

*Dylan: I don't know ((erm)) I can't really explain it, I didn't really have a feeling ((.)) like I knew he wanted like information for exchange, but ((.)) at the end of the day, I have the information, he doesn't so I could technically control it so ((.)) it's easier for me to just ((.)) get gifts ((laughs)) and it's harder for him to get the information, so it was, ((.)) yeah*

*Jess: I think the last year or so it's made me think, "I'm not going to answer my phone if you're going to ask about mum. I'm not going to answer my phone if you're going to ask me questions. I will answer my phone if you say hi Jess how's your day? And I will answer my phone if you're going to give me money.*

SO....

In what sense is it meaningful to distinguish between adult victims and young victims of domestic violence?



# MORE THAN WITNESSES TO VIOLENCE

Children are not collateral damage in domestic abuse. They EXPERIENCE domestic violence and coercive control

The legal framework does not adequately acknowledge the impact of domestic violence on children

It does not recognize their personhood and capacity for agency.

Focus on the intimate dyad neglects the impact of coercive control and violence on the family as a whole

It is important to recognize, both legally and in work with families affected by domestic violence, that the exercise of power *and* violence in abusive and controlling relational dynamics can be troubling and distressing for children.

# POLICE RESPONSE TO CHILDREN

Empathic and sensitive police responses increased children's experience of safety and wellbeing (Millar and Devaney 2018)

Often a lack of involvement – ignored and excluded (Buckley et al. [2007](#); al. [2002](#); Överlien and Aas [2016](#); Richardson-Foster et al. [2012](#)).

Positioned as 'outside the abuse' (Callaghan et al 2018)

Responsibility of social workers

Lack of training and skills to deal with the emotional harm of abuse for children (Richardson-Foster et al. [2012](#)).

Activity: How might we improve the professional response to children's experiences of coercive control?