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Coercive control: personal warfare that informs governance for humane institutions

October 31, 2025

Coercive control, sometimes referred to as intimate terrorism, is a type of domestic violence in which the perpetrator maliciously inflicts systematic, oppressive violence within the context of a personal relationship or personal association. An oppressor of intimate terrorism seeks to force a perpetual and paradoxically- morbid state of fear and dependency to exploit its victim. Coercive control robs a victim of his/her basic human needs and rights, autonomy, and can erode his/her identity by way of its connived scheme of deprivation, intimidation and domination. This type of domestic violence leverages a self-reinforcing power and control dynamic that can result in its victim's identity confusion and beyond.

The foundation of coercive control is planned by the oppressor's corruption and built upon through military style tactics; at least initially, it tends to entail a partial profile of subtle and layered practice of deception that naturally and logically evolves to require the least effort from the oppressor over the course of the personal relationship. In the most fortunate of situations, a victim can observe the oppressor's scheme as a veiled disguise of concern or personal regard that is a plot to impose intervals of systematic dehumanization and impersonal violence. Nonetheless, a victim of coercive control must not forget that the oppressor targeted him/her with the intention to entrap, exploit and govern the victim, dictating access or not to his/her most basic needs, and to steal his/her life.

Another primary feature of this type of domestic abuse is that it is often hidden in plain sight. However, a non-exhaustive list of coercive control tactics includes the isolation of a victim, restricted and or surveilled movement and or communications, threats of harm including those against significant others as well as pets, financial abuse and sabotage, employment sabotage, sleep deprivation, humiliation and illogical criticisms, a theft of personal freedoms, theft of freedom of choice, the intent to impose a fear-based mindset, violent interrogation, gaslighting and more.

In almost all of the studied “cases” of coercive control by this clinician-writer, a victim possesses a character and unique qualities in which an oppressor can only speculate, obsess over and envy, because of and due to the offender’s internalized, pathological, and projected love-hate attachment style which over the course of time in the personal association does likely escalate the offender’s dysregulation in the areas of cognitive capacity, emotions, and other behaviors. International experts in the field of domestic violence believe coercive control to be the most extreme form of domestic violence. Coercive control at its most basic level can be conceptualized as a hostage-taking situation by a secret military regime but within the context of a personal relationship that progressively becomes more deceptive and forceful in order to punish, exploit, and extinguish the victim due to his/her birthrights and specialness. It is reasonable that the longer and more frequent coercive control tactics are experienced, the more likely a victim is to develop a distorted self-concept, a prolonged and conditioned terror state, and the possibility of enduring chaotic upheaval with functional disruptions across all domains of life.

Because coercive control relies on the natural and logical progression of an established interpersonal power and control dynamic within the specific context and stratification of a culture and its subcultures, a victim of coercive control may survive more intense and frequent attacks over a longer period of time than within the other three (3) types of domestic violence identified by sociologist and international domestic violence expert Michael P. Johnson, PhD (ie, Johnson's Typology). It is inherently an established power and control dynamic that is cumulatively reinforced the more deprived, exploited, fearful, and intimidated its victim. Research findings have shown that this type of domestic abuse often results in lethal violence even when there was a multi-variable absence of historical physical violence therein.

Coercive control is the most likely type of domestic abuse to result in progressively invasive, cumulative, and severe injury to its victims. It is reasonable that a victim could become aware of his/her victimization at a time that is after he/she is already in an established and reinforced pattern of deprived bondage with his/her oppressor; that is, it may be common that a victim realizes that there was a scheme after he/she is already entrapped, has little to no resources for escape, and is confronted with imminent danger. Research has shown that coercive control is the most likely form of domestic abuse to escalate in intensity over time, the least likely to be mutually-abusive, and the most likely to involve serious injury or peril as compared to the other three (3) forms of domestic violence identified within "Johnson's Typology". Of notable relevance for the purpose of this summarized report is that Johnson also coined the terms "*generally-violent-antisocial*" and "*dysphoric-borderline*" to identify the two personality types of an oppressor within the intimate terrorism dynamic. However, the personality types of an oppressor may be discussed in another summary report by this clinician writer later.

A clear, comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of coercive control serve as the “*golden thread model*” involved in all types of domestic violence and paradoxically within humane, competent systems and institutions of governance (ie, family court, criminal investigations and courts, foster care and social services, examination rooms, treatment rooms, safe houses, jails and prisons, organizations and systems of people, etc.), locally and across the globe. While more research seems justified, US researchers have determined that victim-survivors of coercive control are moderately likely to develop Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Victims of coercive control have survived substantial and recurrent violence.

There is an urgent and significant need for trauma-informed processes, programs, and institutions of governance.



FINAL DRAFT 1 - THE GOLDEN THREAD 10.31.25