

**SURVIVING**

**ECONOMIC**

**A B U S E**

---

# Seen yet sidelined

How economic abuse is reflected and responded to within successful prosecutions of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence

---

**Nicola Sharp-Jeffs, Kathryn Royal and Keith Gibson**  
**September 2023**



**My life has been turned upside-down. I have been forced to sell my house and I am homeless. All my money went on supporting him...I'm still in massive debt, he maxed out my credit card, and I have no chance of getting a mortgage now. I've had to rehome my dogs, I'm unable to work. I've lost everything."**

**(Victim personal statement, 2019:21)**

# Acknowledgements

**This report is dedicated to the women who have lost their lives over the seven years featured in this report.**

Thank you to the four victim-survivors of economic abuse who so generously gave their time to talk to us about their experience of a former partner being successfully prosecuted for Controlling or Coercive Behaviour. Our thanks too to the many women who shared their experiences in the media with the intention of encouraging others to come forward and know that support is available. Your voices bring this report to life and make a compelling case for why improvements in responding to economic abuse are needed within the criminal justice system.

The authors wish to thank Sarah Learmonth whose work this report builds upon. Thanks also to Cyrene Siriwardhana (Legal and Policy Manager) and Lauren Garrett (Financial Services Manager) at Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) for feeding into the report recommendations. Professor Liz Kelly of the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU) at London Metropolitan University – SEA's research partner – reviewed the report. We appreciate and value your expertise.

Last, but certainly not least, SEA wishes to thank Barclays UK for funding this vital research and the insight it provides. Only through a truly coordinated community response to economic abuse which involves all stakeholders, including the financial services sector, can we ensure the economic justice needs of victim-survivors are met. We are delighted to have embarked on delivering a training programme for Barclays UK's dedicated colleagues, increasing their skills still further to secure even better customer outcomes. We call on all financial services firms to follow suit.

## About Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA)

Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) is the only UK charity dedicated to raising awareness of economic abuse and transforming responses to it. The charity works day in, day out to ensure that women are supported not only to survive, but also to thrive.

## About the SEA and CWASU partnership

Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) and the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU) at London Metropolitan University have a strategic partnership to accommodate growing interest in the field of economic abuse. The purpose of the partnership is to provide a clear focus for research, education and knowledge transfer to academics, professionals working in the sectors related to this field and victim-survivors. The partnership aims to publish research on economic abuse and increase the impact of research, supporting the uptake of evidence into policy or practice changes. Dr Nicola Sharp-Jeffs is an Emeritus Fellow at CWASU and Dr Kathryn Royal and Keith Gibson are Research Fellows there. They all work at Surviving Economic Abuse.

## About Barclays UK

Barclays UK is a British universal bank. We are diversified by business, by different types of customer and client, and geography. Our businesses include consumer banking and payments operations around the world, as well as a top-tier, full service, global corporate and investment bank, all of which are supported by our service company which provides technology, operations and functional services across the Group. For further information about Barclays UK, please visit our website [www.barclays.co.uk/](http://www.barclays.co.uk/)

## Note on use of the term victim-survivor

The combined term victim-survivor is used to acknowledge that anyone who is experiencing abuse is already surviving what they are in. The term 'victim' can be useful and even empowering when someone is trying to access justice, for example, in court. Some people feel the term validates their experience and reassures them that the perpetrator's actions were not their fault. However, other people dislike the term 'victim' because they feel it is disempowering or makes them appear vulnerable. Use of the term victim within this report is, therefore, only used within citations.

# Foreword from Barclays UK

Our aim at Barclays UK is to offer an accessible, empathetic and inclusive service for our customers, including those who may have complex needs or who experience difficult life events.

Barclays UK is a signatory to the revised UK Finance 2021 Financial Abuse Code of Practice, which sets out how participating banks and building societies should support customers who are victims and survivors of economic or financial abuse. Individuals who experience these situations can be extremely vulnerable.

Barclays UK has in place an award-winning partnership with the charity Refuge which supports individuals who are experiencing economic or technology-facilitated abuse, giving them the required assistance and, where relevant, connecting them to dedicated colleagues in Barclays for extra support with their accounts.

This new report from Surviving Economic Abuse places a spotlight on the insidious nature of economic abuse and provides valuable insight to inform future action to provide support for these individuals; we at Barclays UK look forward to continuing to work with SEA, UK Finance and other parties on this agenda.

# Contents

## **Acknowledgments 3**

## **Foreword from Barclays UK 5**

## **Executive summary 7**

- Summary of recommendations 9

## **Introduction 11**

## **Chapter one: From financial to economic abuse 13**

- What is economic abuse? 14
- The targets of control 15
- Economically abusive behaviours 15
- Economic abuse as a form of controlling or coercive behaviour 17
- Economic abuse post-separation 20
- The links between coercive control and domestic homicide/suicide 20

## **Chapter two: Operation of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour (CCB) Offence 22**

- Aim of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence 23
- Awareness of controlling or coercive behaviour 23
- Police recorded incidents 24
- Evidencing controlling or coercive behaviour, including economic abuse 25
- Bringing offenders to justice 26
- Conviction rates 27
- Custodial sentences 28
- Compensation and confiscation 28
- Improved outcomes for victim-survivors 29
- Deterring offenders 29

## **Chapter three: Research methodology 31**

- Quantitative analysis of the sample 32
- Qualitative analysis of the known economic abuse cases 33
- Interviews with victim-survivors 33
- Limitations of the research 33
- Presentation of findings 34

## **Chapter four: Known economic abuse within successful prosecutions of controlling or coercive behaviour 35**

- Make up of cases: intimate partner or adult family members 36
- Demographic of cases 36
- Police force area 38
- Prosecution of cases by court 39
- Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence cases prosecuted as a 'standalone' offence 39
- Reporting economic abuse to the police 41
- Disclosures of economic abuse 44
- Evidencing economic abuse 45
- Defendant pleas 46
- Previous convictions 47
- Sentencing 47
- Restraining orders 47
- Perpetrator programmes 47
- Rehabilitation programmes 47
- Fines/costs/compensation/victim surcharge 47

## **Chapter five: How economic abuse is 'seen' within media reports 49**

- Recognition of economic abuse 50
- Targets of control 50
- How economic abuse threads through coercive control 60
- Resistance 61

## **Chapter six: The impact of economic abuse and how the courts respond 62**

- Impacts of economic abuse 63
- Economic injustice 64
- Recognising economic abuse within sentencing 64
- Recognising economic abuse through compensation 65
- Recognising economic abuse through confiscation 66

## **Chapter seven: Conclusions and recommendations 67**

# Executive summary

This updated analysis of successfully prosecuted cases of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence reveals that economic abuse is no longer 'hidden' in plain sight. Experiences of economic control are being shared by domestic abuse victim-survivors with police officers and in courts up and down the country.

An analysis of 810 successfully prosecuted cases of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence reported by the media found that two-thirds (64%) reference at least one form of economic abuse. This is broadly consistent with the analysis undertaken for Surviving Economic Abuse's 2017 report, **Into Plain Sight**, which uncovered economic abuse in 60 per cent of cases. In many ways, the offence has provided an improved legal framework within which to tackle this form of coercive control by incorporating women's experiential definitions of abuse into criminal law for the first time. Many of the victim-survivor experiences of economic control outlined within this report would previously have gone undocumented and unpunished.

Perpetrators used a host of tactics to interfere with the ability of victim-survivors' to acquire, use and maintain economic resources. The tactics used fell under the categories of economic restriction, exploitation, and sabotage, highlighting the many different forms that economic abuse takes and the fact that economic abuse can happen to anyone, including those from affluent backgrounds. However, although some media reports explicitly recognised and named these behaviours as financial or economic control or abuse, this was not widespread. Indeed, the findings suggest that victim-survivors were not in touch with the police because of economic abuse, nor did they always recognise this as their experience until later.

These findings reinforce SEA's 2017 recommendation that awareness-raising activity needs to be undertaken so that different forms of economic control are recognised as abusive. This is vital given research which suggests that half of domestic homicides feature controlling or coercive behaviour and that economic issues were identified in just over a third of intimate partner homicides analysed by the Home Office (Home Office, 2016).

Just over half of the successfully prosecuted cases were linked to a physical assault and the known economic abuse cases appeared to be more likely to involve stalking. Moreover, nearly one in ten cases were prosecuted alongside charges linked to threatening behaviour/fear/serious distress/threats to a life. In one of the known economic abuse cases the perpetrator was found guilty of manslaughter – creating a context of such control that the victim-survivor felt they had no choice but to take their own life. Warning signs of economic abuse and other forms of non-physical abuse need to be recognised more widely to support early recognition and intervention so that cases are, in turn, prosecuted earlier and do not escalate to the levels described within the news reports analysed.

Whilst all police forces in England and Wales have now put forward cases for successful prosecution, some forces have put forward more than others. Since only a fraction of police reported cases are taken forward to charge and then prosecution, this analysis indicates that perhaps only the strongest cases are progressed. Moreover, less than a third of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence cases were prosecuted as a standalone crime. Because so few cases were prosecuted with the understanding that physical assault can be 'encompassed' within Controlling or Coercive Behaviour, these findings lend weight to the argument that coercive control has become 'the offence' rather than the overriding framework. Charging multiple offences also leads to the practice of plea-bargaining leaving victim-survivors believing that 'true justice would have looked slightly different' (Victim-survivor, Irya).

Successful prosecutions in known economic abuse cases also appear to rely on witness statements made by the victim-survivor. The in-depth interviews with women undertaken by SEA suggested that, in some cases, police officers may even dismiss other evidence linked to economic abuse. In the words of one victim-survivor, economic abuse is seen, but is 'very much on the sidelines' (Ruth) within police and court responses.

Given the use of banking products and systems within the tactics used by perpetrators to interfere with a victim-survivor's ability to use, acquire and maintain economic resources, the government should also consider what role the financial services sector could play in supporting criminal prosecutions of controlling or coercive behaviour. Similarly, tactics linked to perpetrator interference with victim-survivor's employment highlights the potential of improving partnership working with bodies engaged with employers too.

The substantially larger sample size analysed in this study meant that not only was it possible to explore how economic abuse is reflected within successfully prosecuted cases of Controlling or Coercive Behaviour, but to begin to understand the impact economic abuse has on victim-survivors and how this form of control is responded to by the criminal justice system.

The research findings made clear the devastating economic impact that economic abuse has on the lives of victim-survivors, including homelessness, loss of possessions, jobs and prospects and being left in debt with a poor credit score. Whilst sentencing guidelines in 2018 introduced a new aggravating factor of 'victim left in debt, destitute or homeless due to exploitation of finances' just two media reports referred to this, despite these being themes arising in the analysis. Similarly, only one mention of the Proceeds of Crime Act was uncovered.

As well as wanting economic abuse to be recognised by the criminal courts, victim-survivors seek economic justice through action to address the costs arising from economic abuse, such as reparation. Again, despite the loss and damage described within the known economic abuse cases analysed, just two per cent resulted in compensation orders. It represented a further injustice to victim-survivors of economic abuse that compensation will, in some cases, be limited by the offender's own resources and may not be given, even where loss is established. One of SEA's recommendations is that compensation should be paid to the victim-survivor by the government (perhaps from the victim surcharge) with attempts then made to pursue the perpetrator for reimbursement when their financial circumstances allow.

This is particularly important since there appeared to be an assumption made by the courts that the financial affairs of victim-survivors of economic abuse will be resolved in the family courts following criminal proceedings which is not necessarily the case. There is an urgent need for the courts to take all possible measures to provide reparation for victim-survivors of economic abuse using existing criminal justice mechanisms.

At the same time, existing powers do not capture all the harms arising from economic abuse, such as a poor credit score. SEA is therefore also calling on the government to work with credit reference agencies to explore the potential of international practice such as Canadian Restitution Orders which not only require the offender to pay the victim-survivor for the financial losses they suffered, but to address a victim-survivor's credit history or rating. Only by creating economic stability for victim-survivors can they rebuild their lives safely.

Themes for consideration are put forward within recommendations to the Westminster Government below, alongside suggested directions for future research.



# Summary of recommendations

## Government awareness raising

---

1. Awareness-raising activity needs to be undertaken so that behaviours which seek to interfere with an individual's ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources are understood as abusive.
2. Awareness of coercive control needs to be raised from a young age.
3. There needs to be increased awareness of coercive control experienced by older victim-survivors, including when their partner has taken on a caring role.

## The criminal justice response

---

4. Police guidance on the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence should ensure that responding officers are aware of the many different forms that economic abuse takes.
5. Police training needs to equip officers to be able to establish whether there are patterns of controlling or coercive behaviours underlying the incident that led to a police callout as well the ability to proactively recognise and identify the signs of coercive control, including economic control when a victim-survivor is making a statement and may be alluding to these behaviours within their description of the circumstances.
6. Skills related to evidencing economic abuse need to be further developed by the police.
7. There is a need to better understand the nature of criminal/property damage when these charges are brought alongside the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence.
8. Guidance should be developed to help the judiciary interpret the aggravating factor of 'victim left in debt, destitute or homeless due to exploitation of finances' within sentencing guidelines.
9. All parts of the criminal justice system should incorporate an understanding of both physical and economic safety within responses to victim-survivors.
10. Defendants should not be allowed to bring civil proceedings against a current or former partner when criminal proceedings are ongoing.
11. Situations in which separated couples are forced to live together due to financial pressures must also be addressed as such scenarios are unsafe, particularly during criminal proceedings.
12. The courts should consider and take all possible measures to provide reparation for victim-survivors financially impacted by economic abuse using mechanisms within the criminal justice system.
13. Compensation as well as the confiscation of assets derived from criminal conduct should be routinely considered in sentencing for the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence.
14. Where compensation will be limited by the offender's own resources and may not be given (even where loss is established) then it should be paid to victim-survivors by the government (perhaps from the victim surcharge) with attempts then made to pursue the perpetrator for reimbursement when their financial circumstances allow.
15. The Westminster Government should explore the pros and cons of making economic abuse a criminal offence.

## Work with the financial services industries

---

16. In recognition of best practice on responding to economic abuse within the financial services sector, government should consider what role the sector could also play in supporting criminal prosecutions of controlling or coercive behaviour.
17. The government should work with the financial services sector to explore how perpetrators can be held accountable for economic abuse.
18. SEA calls on the government to work with credit reference agencies to explore the potential of international practice such as Canadian Restitution Orders which can address a victim-survivor's credit history or rating. It is vital to find a solution so that these reflect the victim-survivors' own creditworthiness and not the abuse they experienced.

## Work with employers

---

19. The Westminster Government should increase efforts to develop partnership working with bodies engaged with employers with a specific focus on economic abuse.

## Directions for future research

---

20. Research needs to be undertaken to understand how the dynamics of adult family violence differ from intimate partner violence.
21. Research needs to be undertaken to understand how factors such as disability, religion, race, and socio-economic status shape victim-survivor experiences.
22. Research needs to be undertaken to explore the dynamics of economic abuse within so-called 'honour' based violence and forced marriages, including the supporting roles played by family members in intimate partner violence.
23. Research into the operation of similar offences across Scotland and Northern Ireland that can be compared to the operation of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence in England and Wales would be valuable.
24. Future research needs to look at unsuccessful prosecutions of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence and compare these to prosecutions in Scotland.

# Introduction

The first analysis of economic abuse within successful prosecutions of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence were presented in the [Into Plain Sight](#) research report published by Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) in December 2017 - two years after the Offence was brought into force by section 76 of the [Serious Crime Act 2015](#).

It had been widely acknowledged that the introduction of the new Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence provided a framework through which to understand and address emotional/psychological abuse. There was no recognition at the time that the Offence would also act as a mechanism through which to better respond to financial abuse, or economic abuse more broadly (Sharp & Learmonth, 2017; Sharp-Jeffs, 2022). SEA's report made economic abuse visible for the first time, by showing that economic control was a feature in 60 per cent of cases.

This finding underpinned SEA's call for economic abuse to be recognised within the landmark Domestic Abuse Bill announced by former Prime Minister Theresa May in 2017. SEA argued that reference to financial abuse within the existing policy definition of domestic abuse failed to recognise the range of behaviours that perpetrators use to control their partners. Although money is central to both terms (Singh, 2022) and they involve similar behaviours, financial abuse is best understood as a 'sub-category' of economic abuse (Sharp-Jeffs, 2015). Financial abuse refers to the control of money and finances, whereas economic abuse also involves the control of resources that money can buy, such as food, mobile phones and transport (Littwin, 2012).

SEA's call was successful, and in January 2019 the Westminster Government published a draft Domestic Abuse Bill which both named and defined economic abuse: explicitly recognising SEA's argument that economic abuse 'encompasses a wider range of behaviours than financial abuse' ([Home Office](#), 2019:6). Moreover, the Westminster Government made seven commitments to address economic abuse within its plan of action moving forward<sup>1</sup>.

The first of these commitments addressed the report recommendation that updated statutory guidance on the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence should reference economic abuse. In the end, not only did updated guidance reflect the inclusion of economic abuse within the statutory definition of domestic abuse, but it also reflected a change to the Offence itself ([Home Office](#), 2023).

This is because, in 2021, SEA went on to successfully campaign for the removal of the 'living together' requirement from the definition of 'personally connected' in Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015. The offence previously applied to former intimate partners only if they continued to live together – arising from the mistaken expectation that all forms of post-separation abuse could be addressed via the Protection from Harassment Act (1997). Consequently, the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence now applies, regardless of whether the victim and perpetrator live together or are still in a relationship, meaning that economic abuse and other forms of abuse that start, continue, or escalate post-separation can be prosecuted. This amendment came into effect in April 2023.

**Table 1: Overview of progress towards achieving the Into Plain Sight report recommendations (Sharp-Jeffs & Learmonth, 2017)**

1. The Westminster Government should recognise economic abuse within the statutory definition of domestic violence that is being developed within the Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill: achieved January 2019
2. Statutory guidance on controlling or coercive behaviour should name and define economic abuse: achieved April 2023
3. Consideration needs to be given about how to address forms of economic abuse which result in economic costs to the victim in sentencing and possibly criminal injury claims: achieved October 2018
4. Awareness-raising activity needs to be undertaken so that behaviours which seek to interfere with an individual's ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources are understood as abusive (see conclusions and recommendations)
5. The Westminster Government should consider making economic abuse a criminal offence (see conclusions and recommendations)
6. Responses to domestic violence cases should incorporate an understanding of both physical and economic safety (see conclusions and recommendations)

This updated report presents an analysis of the first seven years of successful prosecutions of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence (December 2015 – December 2022). It builds on the original sample of 35 successfully prosecuted cases identified by SEA within the first two years (December 2015 – December 2017) of the operation of the Offence. It is published before the first prosecutions of Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offences post-separation are brought forward.

Chapter one of the report outlines changing discourse from financial to economic abuse and sets out evolving understanding of what this form of coercive control looks like in practice. Chapter two goes on to consider what the Home Office sought to achieve through introducing the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence, considering findings of a 2021 review of the offence with specific attention paid to prosecuting economic abuse. Chapter three sets out the research methodology. Chapters four to six present the findings of the research including how economic abuse is experienced by victim-survivors, the impacts and how the criminal justice system responds. Finally, chapter seven considers the findings in relation to chapters one and two, drawing conclusions and making recommendations for change.



# **Chapter one:**

## **From financial to economic abuse**



## Chapter one: From financial to economic abuse

In 2005 the Westminster Government introduced the first cross-governmental policy definition of domestic violence:

**“Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse [psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional] between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.” (Home Office, 2005:7)**

This followed calls from women's groups for an integrated strategy to deal with violence against women (Kelly & Westmarland, 2014). Whilst not a statutory or legal definition, statutory agencies were expected to adhere to it. A Supreme Court judgment handed down in January 2011 reinforced that the term 'domestic violence' had come to acquire a meaning beyond physical violence only, and that it should be interpreted to include the use of emotional, psychological, or financial abuse.

In March 2011, the Westminster Government committed to consult on a revised definition of domestic violence in response to a recommendation made by the Home Affairs Committee following its inquiry into domestic violence, including so-called 'honour' killings, and forced marriage (House of Commons, 2008). In September 2012, it was announced that the Government definition would be expanded to include those aged 16-17 and wording changed to reflect the concept of coercive control (Home Office/AVA, 2013).

Because the definition applied to policy development only, the new emphasis on coercive control did not create a change in the law. This meant that there was no way of holding perpetrators to account for the full spectrum of their behaviour via the criminal justice system. Westmarland (2015:5) observed that this was 'more the case for some forms of financial and psychological abuse than for physical and sexual violence'.

It was not until the offence of Controlling or Coercive Behaviour (CCB) in an intimate or family relationship was introduced within Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 that the gap in the law was closed. Yet although it was widely recognised that the new offence provided a mechanism through which to address emotional/psychological abuse, there was less recognition of its potential to address financial abuse or economic abuse more broadly (Sharp-Jeffs & Learmonth, 2017; Sharp-Jeffs, 2022).

### What is economic abuse?

---

The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) recognises economic abuse within the statutory definition of domestic abuse within section 1(1) to (3):

Behaviour of a person (“A”) towards another person (“B”) is “domestic abuse” if (a) A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and (b) the behaviour is abusive.

Behaviour is “abusive” if it consists of any of the following - (a) physical or sexual abuse; (b) violent or threatening behaviour; (c) controlling or coercive behaviour; (d) economic abuse; (e) psychological, emotional, or other abuse; and it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) defines economic abuse within section 4:

Any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on B's ability to (a) acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or (b) obtain goods or services.

This definition clearly draws on the academic definition of economic abuse developed by Adams et al., (2008) which was used within the first **Into Plain Sight** research report:

**“Economic abuse involves behaviours that control a person's ability to acquire, use, or maintain economic resources, thus threatening their economic security and potential for self-sufficiency” (Adams et al. 2008: 564).**

The wording of the Westminster Government definition reflects a broader understanding of financial abuse, by referring not only to money, but also 'other property' and 'goods or services' (Sharp-Jeffs, 2022). Commentary on the provisions found in the Explanatory Notes to the Act further expands on these terms:

"Property" would cover items such a mobile phone or a car and, also include pets or other animals (for example agricultural livestock).

"Goods and services" would cover, for example, utilities such as heating, or items such as food and clothing.

The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) also introduced a provision so that children living in a home in which one adult abuses another adult are automatically treated as victims of domestic abuse, regardless of whether they were present.

### The targets of control

Adams et al., (2019) developed the term 'targets of control' to describe the wide range of economic resources which perpetrators seek to attack. The table below gives examples identified within the 2017 SEA analysis as well as those recognised within the Explanatory Notes to the Act.

**Table 2: Examples of targets of control (from Sharp-Jeffs, 2022)**

Money or other property	Goods and services
Employment and earned income (wages)	Utilities such as heating, water, internet
Other income/money – family income, benefit payments, inheritances and monetary gifts, pension payments	Banking services
Mobile phone	Credit services
Pets or other animals	Food
Housing	Clothing
Transportation (car, train/bus pass)	
Employment	
Laptops, tablets etc.	
Necessities such as toiletries	

Anitha (2019) argues for a broadening out of economic abuse to encompass tasks, responsibilities and roles which are examples of economic activity, but which are not constructed in the same way as paid work. She observes that, through highlighting coercive control in the context of women's performance of their traditional gender roles, Stark (2007) drew 'welcome attention' to this realm, but that it has subsequently been neglected.

### Economically abusive behaviours

Behaviours that limit a person's ability to acquire, use or maintain economic resources fall into three constructs/categories: economic restriction, exploitation, and sabotage (Sharp-Jeffs, 2021). In practice,

and as illustrated by the original **Into Plain Sight** analysis, perpetrators may use one or more of these strategies successively, simultaneously or may switch between them all.

- **Economic restriction** involves limiting access to and use of economic resources, thereby forcibly establishing an arrangement in which the victim is dependent on the perpetrator for financial and material resources. Tactics include limiting access to income, denying access to bank accounts and financial information and imposing limits on the use of property (Adams et al., 2019).
- **Economic exploitation** involves establishing an arrangement in which the victim's economic resources are used for the perpetrator's benefit, diminishing what the victim has built up and compromising their economic well-being<sup>2</sup>. Tactics include demanding that the victim solely pay for household necessities, buy them goods, or pay their bills; stealing the victim's money/property; or generating debt in the victim's name through fraud and/or coercion (Adams et al. 2019).
- **Economic sabotage** involves employment sabotage (Postmus et al., 2016) which may forcibly establish economic dependency on a perpetrator. Other forms of sabotage create economic instability for victim-survivors, limiting their options through absorbing available income and restricting access to future credit (Sharp-Jeffs, 2022). Tactics include disconnecting utilities and ending contracts which must be reconnected/re-established for a fee, destroying economic resources such as mobile phones which must be replaced and ruining credit ratings (Sharp, 2008).

Dependency via economic restriction tends to be assumed in cases of economic abuse (Sharp-Jeffs, 2022). However, understanding the ways in which perpetrators prevent a victim from acquiring, using, and maintaining economic resources is valuable in illustrating how a person may, through experiencing economic exploitation and/or sabotage have access to resources but, due to these strategies, be unable to control how they are used (Sharp-Jeffs, 2022).

Interestingly, recent research by Adams et al. (2023) showed increased use of economic restriction when perpetrators were advantaged in terms of assets or disadvantaged in terms of debt. In contrast, perpetrators showed increased use of economic exploitation when victims were advantaged in terms of assets or credit. This reinforces how both economically advantaged women and economically disadvantaged women are both at risk of economic abuse, but that the nature of that abuse may differ.

The first **Into Plain Sight** research report organised descriptions of economically controlling behaviours identified within newspaper reports into the categories of acquire, use, and maintain. These are presented in the table below alongside the three strategies of restriction, exploitation, and sabotage.

**Table 3: Examples of perpetrator behaviours (restriction, exploitation, and sabotage) which prevent resource acquisition, use and maintenance (Sharp-Jeffs, 2022)**

<p><b>Resource acquisition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Made her leave her job (restriction); threatened to get her sacked (sabotage); pressured her into reducing her working hours (restriction).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Resource use</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Kept all but £500 of her monthly wages of £2,000 (exploitation/restriction); gave her an allowance of £10 per week after taking all her bank cards (restriction)</li> <li>▪ Restricted access to her bank account (restriction)</li> <li>▪ Monitored her bank transactions (restriction)</li> <li>▪ Checked her receipts (restriction)</li> <li>▪ Confiscated her phone (restriction); cancelled her mobile phone contract (sabotage)</li> <li>▪ Refused to put credit on the gas or electric meter (restriction)</li> <li>▪ Took the keys to her car (restriction); used her car, leaving her to catch the bus/walk to work (exploitation)</li> </ul>



### Resource maintenance

- Smashed her mobile phone (sabotage)
- Burned her clothes/throw away her clothes (sabotage)
- Demanded she 'lent' him money and did not pay her back (exploitation)
- Threatened to smash up her home; threatened to pour paint over the carpets and her belongings; threatened to burn her house down (sabotage)
- Took her bank and credit cards (restriction) and emptied the joint bank account (exploitation)
- Demanded the money from her bank account (exploitation)
- Demanded she take a £50,000 debt for him (exploitation)
- Refused to leave the house she was paying rent for (exploitation)
- Damaged or threatened to damage her parent's property (sabotage)

This is particularly striking in demonstrating how the expansion of employment sabotage to economic sabotage more broadly makes visible the demonstrable impact on the ability of victim-survivors to maintain economic resources (Sharp-Jeffs, 2021).

The examples above further show how perpetrators prevent victim-survivors from using or maintaining goods and services in the same way they do money or other property - for instance, stopping a partner from using the car or cancelling a mobile phone contract. This calls into question why the economic abuse definition within the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) differentiates between behaviour that had a substantial adverse effect on a person's ability to (a) acquire, use, or maintain money or other property, or (b) obtain goods or services. For this reason, Sharp-Jeffs (2021) has suggested that sub-sections (a) and (b) of clause 1(4) should be merged in practice so that there is recognition that perpetrators may also prevent a partner from using or maintaining goods or services.

### Economic abuse as a form of controlling or coercive behaviour

The definition of economic abuse very clearly frames it within the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence through use of the term 'substantial adverse effect' (Sharp-Jeffs, 2022). Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act (2015) sets out that for the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence to apply, behaviour on the part of the perpetrator must take place 'repeatedly or continuously' and must have had a 'serious effect' on the victim, meaning that it has caused the victim to fear violence will be used against them on 'at least two occasions', or has had a 'substantial adverse effect on the victims' day-to-day activities' (Home Office 2015:2).

76 Controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship

(1) A person (A) commits an offence if—

- (a) A repeatedly or continuously engages in behaviour towards another person (B) that is controlling or coercive,
- (b) at the time of the behaviour, A and B are personally connected,
- (c) the behaviour has a serious effect on B, and
- (d) A knows or ought to know that the behaviour will have a serious effect on B.

(4) A's behaviour has a "serious effect" on B if— (a) it causes B to fear, on at least two occasions, that violence will be used against B, or (b) it causes B serious alarm or distress which has a substantial adverse effect on B's usual day-to-day activities.

The Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence recognises the harm caused by the cumulative impact of coercion or control on a victim-survivor, highlighting that 'a repeated pattern of abuse can be more injurious and harmful than a single incident of violence' (Home Office, 2015a:3). This is articulated within the statutory definition of domestic abuse through reference to how abusive behaviour can be a 'course of conduct' (Sharp-Jeffs, 2022).

The idea of domestic abuse as a course of conduct is consistent with academic literature in which patterns or combinations of physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse have been variously articulated (Kelly et al., 2014). Victim-survivors identified control over economic resources as a tactic used by perpetrators of domestic abuse as far back as the 1980s, introducing the term 'economic abuse' into discourse through the Duluth Power and Control Wheel (DAIP, 1984).

**Figure 1: The Duluth Power and Control Wheel (DAIP, 1984)**



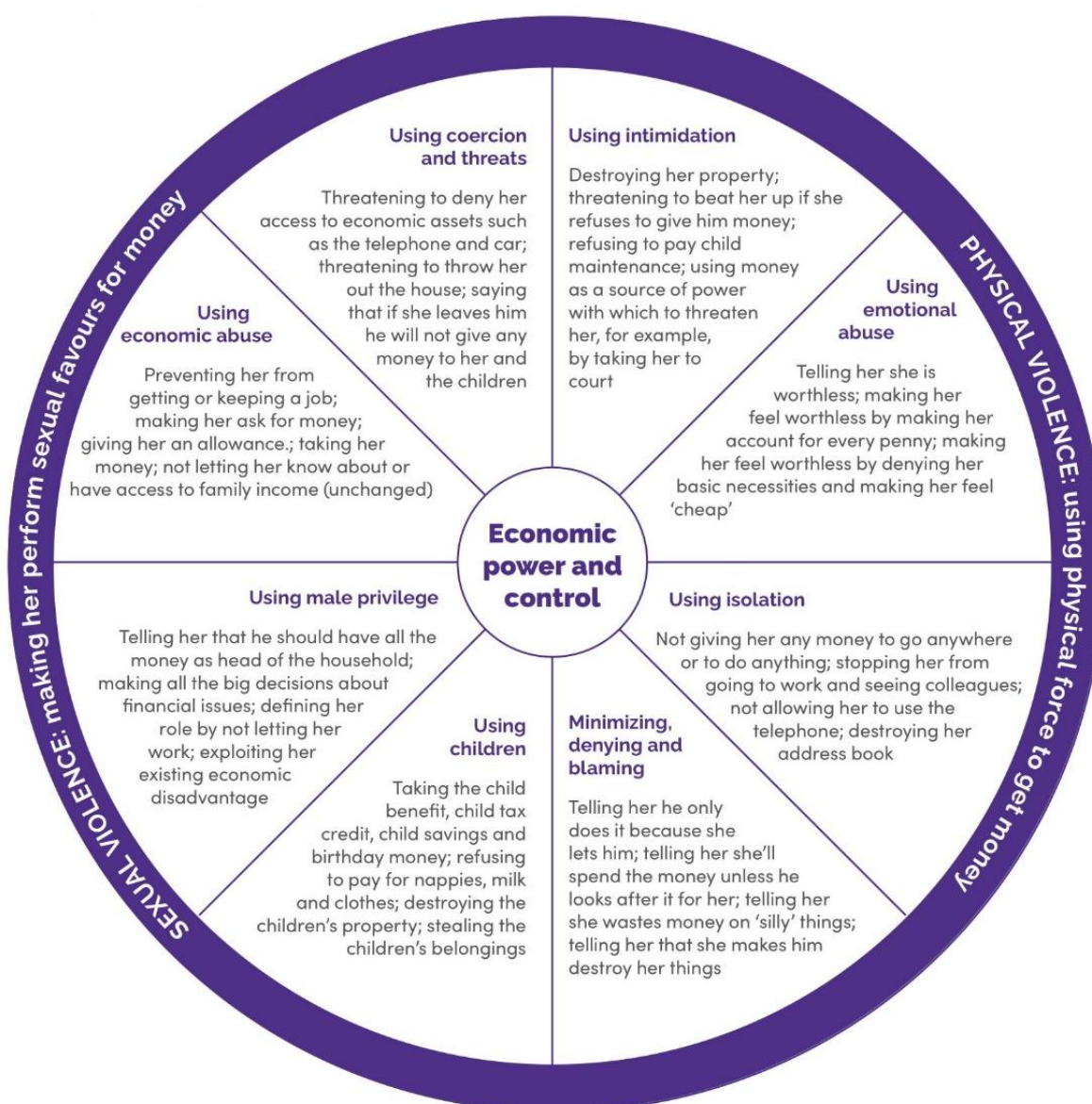
**DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROGRAMS**

202 East Superior Street  
Duluth, Minnesota 55802  
218-722-2781  
[www.theduluthmodel.org](http://www.theduluthmodel.org)

Alongside economic abuse, controlling tactics include isolation, intimidation, coercion and threats and the abuse of children. Physical and sexual violence are positioned within the rim of the wheel. This is significant since it illustrates how the coercive power derived from them is located not just in their actual use, but through ongoing intimidation – what could happen, based on previous experience (Kelly, 1988; Pence & Paymar, 1986). Coercive power is, therefore, predicated on the victim-survivor's belief that they can and will experience negative consequences for non-compliance (Dutton & Goodman, 2005). This creates a context in which refusing a demand is dangerous, compelling a victim-survivor to act in accordance with the perpetrator's wishes, rather than their own.

Economic abuse overlaps with, threads through, and reinforces other forms of coercive control as illustrated by the Economic Power and Control Wheel, an adaptation of the Duluth Power and Control Wheel.

**Figure 2: The Economic Power and Control Wheel (Sharp, 2008)**



Adapted with permission from: DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROGRAMS, 202 East Superior Street, Duluth, Minnesota 55802, 218-722-2781 [www.theduluthmodel.org](http://www.theduluthmodel.org)

Sharp, N. (2008) 'What's yours is mine' The different forms of economic abuse and its impact on women and children experiencing domestic violence, Refuge

Behaviours linked to economic abuse can also be emotionally abusive. These include constantly telling a victim they are worthless, whilst making them feel worthless – making them account for every penny because they cannot be trusted to manage money; or denying them access to necessities such as food, water, heating, clothing, and toiletries. Similarly, isolation can be created by not giving a partner any money to go anywhere or do anything; stopping them from going to work and seeing their colleagues; not allowing them to use the car, telephone etc. (Sharp-Jeffs, 2022).

The ultimate challenge to coercive control – separation or its threat – is when a female victim is at highest risk of being killed. There were 134 domestic homicides in the year ending March 2022. Of these, 78 victims were killed by a current or former partner (up from 69 in the previous year), 40 were killed by a parent, son, or daughter (up from 28) and 16 were killed by another family member (down from 19). Of the 78 victims killed by a current or former partner, 77 per cent (n=60) were female ([Office for National Statistics, 2022](#)).

Traditional gender norms and stereotypes constrain women's options in the home, economy, and community (Stark, 2020) – their acceptance means coercive control often happens 'in plain sight' (Stark 2007). This means that the Wheel cannot 'be simply read across into other relationships which are often generational and in which the issues of gender and sexuality play out differently' (Kelly & Westmarland, 2014). As Singh (2020) observes, there are 'continuities and differences' in experiences of coercive control, with differences based on race, sexual orientation, age, class, immigration status and other characteristics. That much of our understanding of domestic abuse, including economic abuse, draws on this evidence base suggests that, to a large extent, the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence reflects the experiences of heterosexual female victims. It is, therefore, problematic that in England and Wales, the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence also extends to other familial relationships.

The equivalent Scottish offence, however, is more restricted in scope – justified on the basis that abuse of partners and ex-partners has – as suggested above – a different dynamic to other forms of abuse (Scott, 2020). Elder abuse, commonly perpetrated by an adult child or carer towards an elderly parent will not, for example, be experienced in the same way as a young person being forced into marriage by a family member(s) (Sharp-Jeffs, 2022).

## **Economic abuse post-separation**

---

It is common for coercive control to continue after a victim has left a perpetrator (Tuerkheimer, 2013) and this is particularly the case for economic abuse since it does not require physical proximity to perpetrate (Stark, 2007). This means that it may continue, escalate, or even start post-separation (Kelly et al; 2014).

A Cooperative Bank/Refuge survey found that some behaviours post-separation remained the same including damaging/stealing property, spending money from the joint account, spending money in their partner's personal account, running up bills in their partner's name and interfering with employment (Sharp-Jeffs, 2015; see also Kelly et al., 2014). New behaviours include refusing to give child support/maintenance, prolonging the sale of joint property, and continually taking their partner to court, resulting in financial costs. Indeed, the paper accompanying the publication of the draft Domestic Abuse Bill acknowledged the criminal and family court systems as mechanisms used by perpetrators to generate legal costs for a victim-survivor (HM Government, 2019).

## **The links between coercive control and domestic homicide/suicide**

---

Recent research (Wade, 2023) suggests that half of domestic homicides feature controlling or coercive behaviour. Economic issues were identified in just over a third of intimate partner homicides analysed by the Home Office (Home Office, 2016). In addition, the experience of economic abuse is positively correlated with suicide (Aitken & Munro, 2018).

The Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-based Violence (DASH) risk identification, assessment, and management model prompts police officers to consider whether a victim-survivor is financially

dependent on the perpetrator, or if the perpetrator has recently lost their job. However, Wire and Myhill (2018) observe that this question is often misinterpreted by police officers and acts most often as a proxy measure for deprivation rather than establishing whether financial control is being exerted. An evaluation also found that police officers ranked economic issues nearly bottom in terms of importance when assessing risk in domestic abuse cases (Robinson et al. 2016).

The DASH has recently been replaced by the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA) and identified by the College Professional Committee and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) as the preferred risk tool for police first responders to domestic abuse. It asks: How often does [X] deny you access to money, or control what you can spend it on?

Sharp-Jeffs (2022) notes that SEA and the charity Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA) have drawn attention to cases of homicide/suicide where the perpetrator(s) have benefitted from life insurance payouts and/or the disposal of the victim-survivor's economic assets. Indeed, perpetrators can continue to control joint assets, including after prosecution for murder/manslaughter, for example, via frustrating the sale of a property (Orr, 2020), thereby withholding vital funds. A study on domestic homicide found that 11 children were living with family members who were struggling financially (Stanley, Chantler, & Robbins, 2019).





# **Chapter two:**

## **Operation of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour (CCB) Offence**



## Chapter two: Operation of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour (CCB) Offence

In March 2021, the Home Office used a logic model to undertake a rapid review of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence to assess its effectiveness and whether any changes to the legislation, or any wide policy interventions, were needed. This chapter uses the framework of the logic model to present research which has focused on prosecuting economic abuse.

### Aim of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence

---

The stated aim of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence when it came into force was to 'close a gap in the law around patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour during a relationship between intimate partners, former partners who still live together, or family members.'

The Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence is not totally unprecedented in criminalising economic control as a form of 'non-physical' abuse. For instance, criminal damage and theft penalises some forms of economic abuse. Similarly economic crime, including criminal activity such as fraud is another mechanism for holding perpetrators to account.

In research commissioned by SEA to explore whether and how the finance sector could focus on perpetrators of economic abuse, Garner and Kelly (2023) reflect on the misuse of financial products and services, in potentially criminal ways. They recommend that the potential of making economic abuse a financial crime needs to be further explored.

What is distinctive about the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence is that it captures significant, harmful activities which previously went unpunished (McMahon & McGorrery, 2020), although would have been illegal if committed against a stranger (Stark, 2012). For instance, the early cases reported on in the first **Into Plain Sight** research revealed that offenders convicted of the offence had isolated their partners by confiscating or destroying their mobile phones and prohibited their partners from engaging in employment (Sharp-Jeffs & Learmonth, 2017).

Capturing these harms through a course or pattern of behaviour is particularly important when 'individual incidents of abuse may themselves appear to be relatively minor and transient in impact' (McMahon & McGorrery, 2020:17). As Stark and Hester (2019) observe, the offence incorporates victim-survivor's experiential definitions of abuse into criminal law, responding to what many describe as the 'worst part' – emotional and economic control depriving them of liberty, autonomy, and identity (McMahon & McGorrery, 2020).

### Awareness of controlling or coercive behaviour

---

The creation of the offence was expected to produce the outputs of increasing awareness and understanding of controlling or coercive behaviour, both across the criminal justice system (the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, and the courts) and among the public (Home Office, 2021).

When the offence came into force, statutory guidance was issued to help criminal justice agencies recognise indicators that the offence was occurring and prompt an investigation. The **Into Plain Sight** research report observed that financial abuse was included within a list of the types of behaviour associated with control or coercion. These included the control of finances such as 'only allowing a person a punitive allowance'. Whilst not named as such, it also included some examples of economic abuse, including criminal damage (such as the destruction of household goods), preventing a person from having access to transport, and preventing a person from working.

Communications on the new legislation were also released by the Home Office. In their review of the offence in 2021, feedback from stakeholders highlighted the need for greater awareness of it amongst the public. Domestic abuse charities (including SEA) suggested that victims did not initially recognise

what was happening to them as a form of abuse or felt that the police would not take it seriously. This was particularly flagged in cases of economic abuse.

Barwick et al., (2020) note that victims frequently do not initially report emotional or economic abuse to the police, rather they will report an 'emergency' that requires immediate police intervention – often an assault. Yet, while making a statement, the victim will allude to controlling or coercive behaviours via a description of the circumstances, or a delay in reporting. This reinforces the need for the police to be able to proactively recognise and identify the signs (Home Office, 2021).

## Police recorded incidents

The Home Office expected that the introduction of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence and raising awareness of it would lead to it being recognised, reported to, and recorded by the police.

The number of Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offences recorded by the police in England and Wales increased steadily – from 4,246 in 2016/17 to 41,626 in 2021/22, the year for which the most recent statistics are recorded.

**Table 4: The number of Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offences recorded by the police in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2022).**

Year	Police recorded
2016/17	4,246
2017/18	9,053
2018/19	17,616
2019/20	24,856
2020/21	33,954
2021/22	41,626
2022/23	Due for publication in November 2023

However, the review undertaken by the Home Office suggests that, based on prevalence estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, only a small proportion of all controlling or coercive behaviour comes to the attention of the police or is recorded as such.

Barlow et al. (2019) investigated the implementation of the offence in one police force area in England and found that it was being both under-used and under-recorded. Examination of actual bodily harm (ABH) offences found missed opportunities for using the Coercive or Controlling Behaviour Offence in almost nine out of ten intimate partner cases, despite evidence of coercive control being identifiable through victim witness statements and previous occurrence records detailing repeat victimisation. Examples included: "use of digital surveillance technologies, sustained verbal threats and abuse, including so-called 'revenge porn' threats, practices of isolation and deprivation and economic abuse" (Barlow et al., 2019: 169). Brennan et al. (2018) suggest that low understanding of patterned abuse may be further compounded by a lack of definitional clarity around non-physical domestic abuse.

Wiener (2017:31) points to the 'violent incident model' within which the police have historically responded to domestic abuse, suggesting that framing a crime in an incident-specific way makes it more easily recognisable – it is seen as 'black and white' – while behaviour that is ongoing and continuous is seen as 'murky'. Barwick et al. (2020) agree, setting out that the police need to be able to see the 'bigger picture' of what is happening and identify the behaviours as part of a pattern of abusive conduct, but recognising that this conflicts with the priority of responding to the incident to which they were called.



Barlow et al. (2019:170) identified the incident-based approach in their qualitative analysis of police case files:

**“One case involved a woman contacting the police to report an attempted assault on her by her male partner. When the police spoke to the woman, she reported various examples of coercive control, including isolation and economic abuse. Moreover, she was a repeat victim of domestic abuse according to the [police] information management system. This case was recorded as coercive control. However, the ensuing investigation focused on the assault and gathering evidence for this particular ‘incident’ rather than investigating any pattern of abusive behaviour. Officers focused on gathering ‘photographic evidence’ of the assault [...] with many of the woman’s descriptions of coercive control being disregarded as examples of ‘one word against the other’, and thus ‘weak’ or ‘unverifiable.’”**

Such difficulties led the Home Office review to conclude that there was likely to ‘be significant room for improvement in understanding, identifying and evidencing coercive or controlling behaviour’ (Home Office 2020:05).

A new statutory guidance framework for controlling or coercive behaviour published by the Home Office in April 2023 to provide ‘information on controlling or coercive behaviour, to assist in identifying, evidencing, charging, prosecuting and convicting the offence’ is presumably intended to address this. Certainly, the framework focuses more attention on economic abuse now that it is named within the statutory definition of domestic abuse, superseding language on financial abuse in the guidance it replaces. Not only are a broader range of economically controlling behaviours given, but they sit within a specific section on economic abuse which runs to four pages. It reminds stakeholders that economic abuse can start/continue post-separation (again listing examples) and outlines the role that financial services firms play in responding through signing up to the UK Finance 2021 [Financial Abuse Code](#).

At the same time, and consistent with Stark (2007), McMahon and McGorrey (2020:4) observe that ‘coercive and controlling behaviours are not categorically different from ordinary gendered behaviour; they occur at the extreme end of the spectrum of power relations that exist in ordinary heterosexual intimate partner relationships.’ The ability of the police to distinguish normative from abusive behaviour can in their view, therefore, create challenges.

Indeed Walklate et al. (2018) caution that it is unlikely that interventions such as training alone will be effective in equipping the police to recognise and respond appropriately to coercive control. They argue that police training generally focuses on procedure rather than the broader social context, which they view as the key barrier to the successful policing of the offence.

As Stark (2012:213) noted before the offence came into law:

**“Reframing domestic violence as coercive control changes everything about how law enforcement responds to partner abuse, from the underlying principles guiding police and legal intervention, including arrest, to how suspects are questioned, evidence is gathered, resources are rationed.”**

## Evidencing controlling or coercive behaviour, including economic abuse

Best practice evidence collection for controlling or coercive behaviour requires investigators to pursue broad sources of inquiry (Home Office, 2021). Prosecutors and academics within the Home Office review noted that there had been cases of effective prosecutions based on good evidence for controlling or coercive behaviour. These included evidence from third parties, including banks to show economic abuse.

At the same time, the Home Office review (2021:32) observes that evidencing controlling or coercive behaviour is cited across the research literature as ‘particularly challenging’ compared with other

domestic abuse-related offences, a view with which McMahon and McGorrery (2020b) concur. McMahon et al., (2020) claim that what 'non-physical' harms generally share is intangibility.

A challenge raised by the police within the Home Office review was that investigating the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence is more reliant on collaborative third-party evidence, for example, statements from family, friends, colleagues, GPs, or on digital evidence, such as from the victim's mobile phone.

In a book chapter on the introduction of economic abuse as a criminal offence within the Family Violence Act (2004) in Tasmania, the authors note how the witness list usually includes a much wider circle of persons than those involved in the incident to which the police responded (Barwick et al. 2020). They go on to observe that for economic abuse cases the investigation can be 'akin to a fraud investigation requiring investigators to determine where the money has gone. This would normally require specialist detective skills... and the necessary time to dedicate to it' (ibid: 152).

This is not to say it cannot be done. Within the chapter, an example of a successful prosecution is given through an accumulation of evidence:

- The victim's bank records which demonstrated a pattern of withdrawals that indicated when her income was deposited, it was immediately withdrawn in its entirety. This pattern ceased after she got help from the police to separate from him, and subsequently showed a pattern of regular household purchases.
- Records from pawn shops confirmed that the offender had pawned items that were likely to belong to a woman or children (such as bicycles, toys, handbags, and hair straighteners).
- Testimony from the victim's extended family that indicated she was not 'allowed' to see them, and on the rare occasions that they did have contact, she was desperate for money to buy food and stated she was too afraid to leave.
- Testimony from the children's school that they were frequently sent to school without lunches and had no uniforms and that the school had tried to support the family, but the offender had not engaged (Barwick et al., 2020: 145).

The Home Office review (2021) also refers to the time-consuming nature of collecting evidence in controlling or coercive behaviour cases and suggests that this may have a negative impact on a victim's willingness to support the case. Since engagement with a victim-survivor is particularly important in the absence of physical assault, victim withdrawal is another challenge raised (McMahon & McGorrery, 2020; Home Office, 2021). As such it is significant to observe that the review undertaken by the Home Office notes that one of the reasons why getting or keeping a victim on board with an investigation can be difficult is because the victim may be financially dependent on the perpetrator.

Additional evidential difficulties may be linked to the requirement of reaching the 'substantial adverse effect' threshold which, according to Bettinson (2020) makes prosecuting without the victim's support impossible.

## Bringing offenders to justice

---

In terms of outcomes, it was intended by the Home Office that Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offences would be charged, prosecuted, and convicted.

Although volumes of police recorded Coercive or Controlling Behaviour Offences have increased each year, only a fraction of police reported cases appear to be charged based on available data.

**Table 5: Statistics on numbers of prosecutions for CCB as principal and non-principal offence, 2017 to 2019 (Home Office, 2021)**

CCB charged as	2017	2018	2019
Principal offence	468	516	584
Non-principal offence	443	429	528
Total CCB prosecutions	911	945	1,112

Issues have been identified at the prosecution stage too. As table six illustrates, the proportion of police recorded cases that reached a first hearing at magistrates' court is low (source: Office for National Statistics, November 2022).

**Table 6: Number of cases that reached a first hearing at magistrates' court**

Year	Police recorded	Prosecution commenced in Magistrates Court
2015/16		5
2016/17	4,246	309
2017/18	9,053	960
2018/19	17,616	1,177
2019/20	24,856	1,208
2020/21	33,954	1,403
2021/22	41,626	1,925
2022/23	Due for publication in November	2,720 <sup>3</sup>

Barlow et al. (2019) found several factors that were often cited as preventing the prosecution of coercive control cases. These included the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) requiring further investigation and evidence; the case not meeting the required evidential threshold; and/or coercive control being dropped from the charge sheet at the same time as other offences, such as assault are progressed to charge.

## Conviction rates

**Table 7: Conviction rate for recorded offences (Home Office, 2021; ONS, 2022)**

Year	Convictions
2015	
2016	59
2017	235
2018	308
2019	305
2020	374
2021	434
2022	Not available

When the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence was introduced, the recording rules set out that unless any associated physical assault was more serious, amounting to at least an offence of grievous bodily harm, it should be recorded as the principal offence. This was to avoid a lesser potential custodial sentence length of the maximum sentence of five years<sup>4</sup>. McGorriery & McMahon (2019) point out that if the principal offence is not controlling or coercive behaviour then important contextual matters will not be considered. Indeed Wiener (2020:161) warns that juries may find it difficult to understand 'the abuse when presented as isolated acts divorced from the narrative necessary to give those acts meaning' (ibid: 161).

Wiener (2020:166) also argues that 'in its determination to close a loophole' the Westminster Government positioned controlling or coercive behaviour as primarily non-physical thereby conceptualising coercive

control and psychological abuse as the same thing when, in fact, controlling or coercive behaviour incorporates both non-physical and physical behaviours. This is illustrated in those cases where defendants are charged with specific offences such as assault, in addition to the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour (McGorry & McMahon, 2020). In many ways, coercive control has become 'the offence' rather than the overriding framework as Kelly and Westmarland (2016) suggested might be a risk.

Difficulties in securing a conviction may also be linked to the 'substantial adverse effect' threshold outlined above. The qualifier that the adverse effect must be 'substantial' allows the possibility that an adverse effect is not in itself enough. Again Wiener (2020) argues that, based on the qualitative research she conducted with judges, the 'substantial adverse' effect requirement 'penalises resilience' in victims; the more 'able' a victim is perceived to be in withstanding the controlling or coercive tactics of their partner, the lower the chances are that the requirement to prove adverse effect will be met. This was certainly the case in 2018 when the media reported that a defendant was cleared of a charge of controlling or coercive behaviour because the victim-survivor had 'shown herself to be a strong and capable woman'<sup>5</sup>.

Commentators point to Scotland in addressing both these issues. McGorry & McMahon (2019) have suggested that it may be preferable for all abusive behaviours to be charged as part of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence, as is the case in Scotland. Similarly, it has been suggested that Section 76 could be revised in line with the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act (2018) which does not require the police and prosecutors to demonstrate the harm that the victim has experienced and instead places the focus of the prosecution on the behaviours and state of mind of the defendant (Home Office, 2021).

## Custodial sentences

---

Another intended outcome of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence was an increase in the severity and effectiveness of punishment for domestic abuse offenders, with a greater number of domestic abuse offenders brought to justice.

As recognised above, the recording rules when the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence was introduced set out that unless any associated physical assault was more serious, amounting to at least an offence of grievous bodily harm, it should be recorded as the principal offence. This was to avoid a lesser potential custodial sentence length of the maximum sentence of five years<sup>6</sup>.

The report's introduction references how, after SEA's 2017 report was published, the Sentencing Council added a new aggravating factor of 'victim left in debt, destitute or homeless due to exploitation of finances' within its guidelines for sentencing intimidatory offences, including controlling or coercive behaviour legislation.

The Home Office (2021) review suggested that where the evidence is strong enough to prosecute and convict, the courts are recognising the severity of the abuse. It found that the average length of custodial sentences for the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence were consistently longer compared with those for assaults - the most common domestic abuse-related offences recorded.

## Compensation and confiscation

---

Research undertaken by Hester et al. (in press) explored how victim-survivors of gender-based violence both experience and perceive justice. Survivors had multiple perceptions of justice, related to different points in their journey following abuse. One of the key themes identified was 'reparation'. The researchers defined this as 'doing something to repair the harm resulting from the abuse' and identified that it involved 'distributive justice' (a socially just allocation of goods and resources) and 'economic and

financial justice' (recognition of economic loss such as housing, job, credit status, standing in community, confidence).

One mechanism through which the criminal justice system can punish offenders whilst simultaneously recognise the long-lasting effects of economic abuse is through compensation and confiscation. In a first-of-its kind report, produced in collaboration with SEA, the law firm Hogan-Lovells (2022) considered legal rights and remedies for economic abuse and highlighted legislation which could be used to this effect, in tandem with the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence to obtain economic reparation for victim-survivors.

The Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 (PCCA) can be used to obtain a compensation order to compensate victims of crime for personal injury, loss or damage resulting from the offence, including financial loss suffered as a direct result of the offence. However, these will be limited by the offender's own resources and so will not be given in all cases, even where loss is established.

In addition, the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA) may enable assets derived from criminal conduct to be confiscated from the perpetrator, with some of these confiscated assets then used to compensate the victim.

## Improved outcomes for victim-survivors

---

In the short term, improved outcomes for victim-survivors of controlling or coercive behaviour were anticipated within the Home Office's logic model.

Certainly, Stark and Hester (2019) suggest that the coercive control offence could help to improve partnership working between the criminal justice system, the community and the third sector and strengthen the support they are able to offer victims. They argued that reframing domestic violence as coercive control would help criminal justice professionals through providing a tool that would relieve their frustration with 'failed' interventions and help shift their attention from victim safety to offender accountability, thereby removing an important context for victim-blaming.

The new law would also facilitate a corresponding shift among community-based services from 'safety work' to 'empowerment'. Incorporating women's experiential definitions of abuse into criminal law would further broaden the perceived legitimacy of legal remedies, particularly among groups who lacked access to resources or other alternatives.

## Deterring offenders

---

In the longer term, the Home Office anticipated that the new offence would lead to a reduction in the prevalence of domestic abuse, through better recognition of these behaviours; and by the punishment of Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offences, providing a deterrent to would-be perpetrators and preventing re-offending.

A factor not only hindering prosecutions, but also limiting the potential of the offence acting as a deterrent was in relation to determining the end of a relationship. For many victim-survivors, separation is a process. For example, they may break up and then reconcile on several occasions – sometimes living separately and sometimes living together. In its review, the Home Office (2021) described how the police may struggle to ascertain whether the victim and perpetrator are in a relationship and apply the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence or not in a relationship and therefore apply other legislation such as stalking or harassment instead.

Given that separation is a risk factor for homicide, this issue was important to address, leading the Home Office (2021:50) to note that the rapid literature review undertaken alongside a stakeholder engagement

exercise provided some 'limited' evidence pointing towards potential areas for legislative change, with the 'most prominent' among these the suggestion that the legislation should be extended to encompass former partners who do not live together. This suggestion not only sought to address confusion around separation, but also the view expressed by stakeholders (including SEA<sup>7</sup>) that the stalking and harassment offences were not applicable or appropriate in all cases of post-separation abuse where the behaviour was closer to coercive control.

As noted in the introduction above, the Government decided to go ahead with legislative change that extended the offence, responding to SEA's call to remove the requirement that parties be in an existing relationship or be living together from the definition of 'personally connected' in Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act. Consequently, the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence now applies, regardless of whether the victim and perpetrator are currently in a relationship or live together, meaning that economic abuse and other forms of abuse that start, continue, or escalate post-separation can be prosecuted.

Applying criminal sanctions to specific forms of non-physical abuse has been suggested as another deterrent to those who use it.

The state of Tasmania in Australia has created a specific criminal offence of economic abuse. Section 8 of the Family Violence Act (2004) criminalises certain types of economic control such as coercing a partner to relinquish control over property; disposing of property without consent; preventing a partner from participating in decisions about spending; preventing a partner from accessing property for normal household expenses; and withholding (or threatening to withhold) financial support (Barwick et al. 2020). There will, of course, be overlap of these behaviours. By 2020, only five cases of economic abuse had been prosecuted. Challenges include a short statutory limitation period (initially 6 months, increasing to only 12 months) and having to prove a 'specific intent' to 'unreasonably' control or intimidate.

The following chapter sets out the methodology for undertaking the analysis of successful prosecutions enabling exploration of some of these issues in more detail.





# **Chapter three:**

## **Research methodology**

## Chapter three: Research methodology

The research methodology adopted for this report builds on that used in the original research study **Into Plain Sight** (Sharp-Jeffs & Learmonth, 2017).

In the absence of a central repository or records of successfully prosecuted cases of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence, media reports were identified instead. Searches were conducted in the LexisNexis news database, Google and Twitter using the terms 'controlling and coercive behaviour', 'coercive and controlling behaviour conviction' and 'coercive control' alongside each of the forty-three police force areas in England and Wales.

As Table Seven below illustrates, more cases were identified for 2015-2017 than had originally been the case. In total, 810 cases were identified in which the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence was successfully prosecuted over a six-year period (December 2015 and December 2022).

The table below also sets out government statistics on the total number of prosecutions by year. It was not possible to identify a government source for the total number of prosecuted cases in 2022. Thus, of all the cases prosecuted between 2016 and 2021 (n=1,764) SEA was able to identify details of 35 per cent (n=610) prosecutions that had resulted in a conviction.

**Table 7: Percentage of prosecutions that resulted in a conviction identified via media reports**

Year	Government stats	SEA sample	% of govt. cases
2016	59	24	40%
2017	235	61	26%
2018	308	83	27%
2019	305	128	42%
2020	374	140	37%
2021	483	174	36%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,764</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>35%</b>
2022	Unknown	200	-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,764</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>-</b>

### Quantitative analysis of the sample

Each case was analysed in relation to a set of categories and recorded in a spreadsheet, enabling aggregate quantitative data to be extracted. The categories included:

- Date
- Court area
- Court
- Judge
- Whether economic abuse was reported
- If economic abuse was reported how the example(s) given linked to the victim-survivor's ability to acquire, use, and/or maintain economic resources.
- Sex of the perpetrator
- Age of the perpetrator
- Sex of the victim-survivor
- Age of the victim-survivor
- Relationship between perpetrator and victim-survivor (intimate partner violence – IPV – or adult family violence – AFV)
- Length of relationship in intimate partner violence cases
- Children in intimate partner violence cases
- Charges against the perpetrator (in addition to section 76)
- Plea of the defendant
- Outcome of case
- Whether a restraining order was granted



- Fine/costs/compensation/surcharges
- Whether the offender was required to attend a programme
- Whether the offender had a previous criminal record

## Qualitative analysis of the known economic abuse cases

---

Qualitative analysis of the 517 cases in which economic abuse was reported (as a sub-sample) was then undertaken. The media report for each case was given a case number made up of the year the successful prosecution took place and the order of identification (not in date order). The cases were then uploaded to NVivo. Themes were identified within the narratives.

## Interviews with victim-survivors

---

SEA also approached contacts and used social media to reach out to victim-survivors whose former partner had been successfully prosecuted for Controlling or Coercive Behaviour, asking them to consider sharing their experience. Ethics approval from London Metropolitan University was given for interviews to take place. In total, four victim-survivors of economic abuse whose cases were part of the overarching sample were interviewed (Krystal - 2018:30; Eva - 2019:41; Irya - 2019:93<sup>8</sup>; and Ruth - 2021:39)<sup>9</sup>. Whilst, their experiences cannot be generalised, their voices bring to life the themes presented within the findings section and indicate areas for further exploration.

Victim-survivor quotes from the qualitative analysis (drawn from victim impact statements and interviews given to the media) are presented within the text of this report, whilst interviews are presented in text boxes.

## Limitations of the research

---

There are several limitations to the study. First, and most significantly, the analysis only includes cases which received news attention, and which could be sourced through internet searches. Research has demonstrated that which cases of crime receive media attention are subject to news values and that the news represents a version of reality, rather than a neutral reporting (Jewkes, 2011).

It is estimated that 610 of the 810 cases included in the analysis represent approximately 35 per cent of prosecutions of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence in England and Wales brought forward and successfully prosecuted between 2016-21 (table seven). Since the number of prosecutions brought forward for the offence in 2022 is unknown, it is not possible to state the proportion of successfully prosecuted cases SEA identified within this. As such, it is not possible to know how representative the cases in the analysis are of all cases.

Similarly, which details are reported on in news coverage are also subject to values, as well as a journalist's understanding of coercive control, and the criminal justice system more generally. It is therefore likely that economic abuse was present in more of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence cases that were not included in the sub-sample of 517 known economic abuse cases because the relevant details were not reported – either because these behaviours were not included in the news coverage or were not included in the details of the criminal case put forward by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

It is important to note that this scenario was uncovered when SEA invited victim-survivors with a successful prosecution of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence to take part in the interviews which formed part of this research. The media report linked to the case of one interviewee sat in the overarching sample (2019:93) and had not been included in the known economic abuse sub-sample because no mention of the extensive economic abuse she experienced was referenced within it. The decision was made not to move this case into the economic abuse sub-sample since it was unlikely to be the only case of this type.

Due to the nature of news reporting, and because the coverage was often sourced in local news coverage, there was also a lack of consistency in which details were reported. For example, details such as the age of the victim, the plea entered by the perpetrator, or the length of the relationship were not

always stated and so could not always be logged. Due to time constraints in sourcing cases, the first media report identified for each case was logged and analysed. Efforts were not undertaken to identify additional news coverage.

It is also important to note that this analysis includes only successful prosecutions of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence, meaning that cases which failed to reach trial stage, were not continued by the CPS or were unsuccessful were not identified or analysed. As such it is not possible to identify if these cases differ significantly from those which failed to secure a conviction, and the experiences of victim-survivors impacted by this. As noted within chapter two, for example, there has been at least one case reported on in which the defendant was cleared of a charge of controlling or coercive behaviour because the victim-survivor had 'shown herself to be a strong and capable woman'.


Finally, although the whole sample was quantitatively analysed (n=810), qualitative analysis was only undertaken in relation to the known economic abuse sub-sample (n=517). Within this, only the intimate partner violence cases (n=444) are reported on within the findings. This report does not report on the family violence cases (n=73). As chapter one sets out, the evidence base on economic abuse is currently overwhelmingly drawn from the experience of women in heterosexual relationships, so the decision was taken to interpret the findings through this lens<sup>10</sup>. This means that it was not possible to compare emerging themes across the known economic abuse cases with the wider sample, nor can comparisons be made with the adult family violence cases.

## Presentation of findings

---

The findings of the research are presented over the next three chapters. Chapter four gives an overview of the quantitative findings and draws out learning in relation to economic abuse. Chapter five then sets out a detailed account of how economic abuse was experienced by victim-survivors through exploring how perpetrators used restriction, exploitation, and sabotage to interfere with their ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources (targets of control). Chapter six shares learning about the impacts of economic abuse and how the criminal justice system responded.

Given the nature of the sample, with media reports varying in length and detail, the findings presented cannot be generalised. However, they do provide rich insight into further understanding how economic abuse is experienced, the impact that this form of abuse has on the lives of victim-survivors and how economic abuse is recognised and responded to by the criminal justice system.

A woman with long dark hair is shown in profile, smiling and looking towards the left. She is wearing an orange top. The background is dark with out-of-focus light spots, creating a bokeh effect.

# **Chapter four:**

## **Known economic abuse within successful prosecutions of controlling or coercive behaviour**



## Chapter four: Known economic abuse within successful prosecutions of controlling or coercive behaviour

The sample of prosecuted Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence cases identified within media reports was 810<sup>11</sup>. Within this sample, nearly two-thirds (n=517, 64%) of media reports referenced at least one example of economic abuse (see table 8).

**Table 8: Percentage of successfully prosecuted cases identified and known economic abuse sample.**

Year	Prosecuted cases (official statistics)	SEA sample of successful prosecutions identified	% of prosecuted cases	No. of known economic abuse cases in sample
2016	59	24	40%	10
2017	235	61	26%	37
2018	308	83	27%	52
2019	305	128	42%	92
2020	374	140	37%	92
2021	483	174	36%	115
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,764</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>35%</b>	
2022	Unknown	200	-	119
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,764</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>517</b>

The table presented in appendix one provides a detailed overview of the findings arising from quantitative analysis of the 810 cases. This chapter provides an overview of these findings, along with learning uncovered through qualitative analysis of the known economic abuse cases.

### Make-up of cases: intimate partner or adult family members

As outlined in chapter one, the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence applies to 'those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members.'

Within the overarching sample (n=810), 85 per cent of cases (n=686) related to intimate partners and four per cent of cases (n=35) related to adult family members. In two cases, it was reported that the defendant abused both their intimate partner and a family member(s). The relationship between the perpetrator and the victim survivor was not known in 11 per cent of cases (n=87).

Within the known economic abuse subsample (n=517), 89 per cent of cases (n=462) related to intimate partners and six per cent (n=32) related to adult family members. The two cases in which the defendant abused both their intimate partner and a family member(s) sat in the known economic abuse sample. The percentage of known economic abuse cases in which the relationship between the perpetrator and victim was unknown was less than the overall sample, at four per cent (n=21).

### Demographics of cases

#### Perpetrator profile

Across both intimate partner and adult family violence cases, the perpetrators were nearly all male (98%, n=796), with females making up just over one per cent (n=10). One perpetrator was a trans man. In three cases the sex of the perpetrator was unknown. The mean age of perpetrators was 34 and the median age was 32. The youngest perpetrator was 16 and the oldest was 81.

There is some difference in terms of sex across the intimate partner and adult family violence cases. In intimate partner (n=686) cases, males represented 99 per cent (n=678) of perpetrators<sup>12</sup> with a mean and median age of 33 and 32 respectively. In adult family cases (n=35) there were slightly fewer male perpetrators, representing 91 per cent (n=32) of the sample with mean and median ages of 35 and 33.

When looking at the known economic abuse sub-sample related to intimate partner violence, the percentage of male perpetrators (where sex was known) was slightly higher at 99 per cent (n=456). The mean age was 34 and the median age was 32.

### **Victim-survivor profile**

Across both intimate partner and adult family violence cases, 94 per cent of the victim-survivors were female (n=764 – this includes cases where there were multiple female victims). One per cent (n=11) of the cases related to a male victim-survivor. In one per cent of cases (n=6) the sex of the victims was mixed and in 3 per cent of cases (n=28) the sex of the victim-survivor was unknown. Where known, the mean age of victim-survivors was 31 and the median age was 27. The youngest victim-survivor was 16 and the oldest was 80.

There were slightly more female victim-survivors in the intimate partner violence cases (96%, n= 659) compared with the adult family violence cases, with a mean and median age of 30 and 37.

However, when sex and age is explored in relation to adult family violence, a different picture emerged. Whilst nearly two-thirds of victim-survivors were female (69%, n=24), one in ten were men (11%, n=4) with a mixture of sexes in 17 per cent (n=6) of cases. Furthermore, where it was known, the mean age of victim-survivors was 58 (compared to 30 in the intimate partner cases) and the median age was 70 (compared to 27 in the intimate partner cases). This reflects that most of the family violence cases involved an adult child abusing a parent or grandparent.

As indicated in chapter three, demographics were not consistently reported beyond sex and age. However, details described in the known economic abuse cases involving intimate partner violence (which were analysed qualitatively) indicated that victim-survivors were diverse. The quotes shared below further illustrate how coercive control is personalised.

### **LGBTQ+**

As indicated above, one perpetrator was a trans man. It was reported that at the beginning of the relationship the perpetrator identified as a woman and was in a relationship with a woman. He later transitioned to his present gender (2021:44). In another case, the victim-survivor stated that she wanted to “help and support other domestic abuse victims, especially in the LGBTQ+ society as domestic abuse is widely viewed as a heterosexual man against a woman” (2022:95).

### **Disability**

The reporting identified that some victim-survivors were disabled, and that this was incorporated into abusive practices.

**“On one occasion she refused to say she loved him and, knowing that she was bed-bound...he turned the lights on in the bedroom so she would struggle to sleep, knowing she couldn't get out of bed to turn them off, [On another occasion] she fell over in her living room and cried out for [him] to help her. He refused and pushed her back down and told her she would stay the night on the floor” (2016:7).**

**“[He] branded the woman a cripple, stopped her attending hospital appointments, banned her from using a stick when they went out together and threatened to kill her” (2017:27).**

**“The court heard how [he] had used ‘distasteful’ abusive words against the woman, who has a disability” (2018:46).**

**“She had major surgery on her legs and is classed as disabled. He said, ‘Why did you end up being a cripple’? He constantly belittled her. He said he would find a girlfriend that could walk properly” (2020:76).**

**“The victim suffered ill health and reduced mobility and [he] started calling her a ‘spastic’. The victim couldn't understand why she was getting so ill when she was taking her medication, but on inspecting the tablets, the capsules were empty” (2021:85).**

## Religion and race

One perpetrator threatened he would never grant his wife a religious divorce.

**“When [name of parties] were attending proceedings at the Court of Appeal, [the perpetrator] again approached [the victim-survivor] during a break in the proceedings and said: ‘You may get all of the money, but I swear on [their daughter’s] life, you will never ever get the Ghet from me’” (2022:30).**

Other victim-survivors experienced racism from the perpetrator.

**“[He] racially abused her...he used vile racial slurs” (2017:5).**

**“The woman was subject to vile racist abuse throughout his reign of terror” (2017:21).**

**“[He] subjected his partner to a ‘nightmare’ relationship in which he was violent, abusive, coercive, and used vile racist language against her” (2020:30).**

In addition, not all victim-survivors spoke English.

**“[Name] ridiculed his now ex-partner, deriding her for ‘not knowing English’” (2018:51).**

**“Because the victim didn’t speak English and therefore couldn’t call the police, she had to run to her friend’s house for help” (2019:52).**

## Police force area

The police force area was identified in nearly all (n=798; 98.5%) of reported cases. As table nine below shows, at least one prosecution was recorded by every police force in England and Wales.

**Table 9: Number of cases by police force area**

Police force	Total	
Greater Manchester Police	71	9%
West Yorkshire Police	40	5%
Merseyside Police	37	5%
South Wales Police	36	4%
Kent Police	32	4%
Northumbria Police	29	4%
Humberside Police	29	4%
Devon and Cornwall Police	27	3%
Derbyshire Constabulary	27	3%
South Yorkshire Police	26	3%
West Midlands Police	23	3%
Nottinghamshire Police	23	3%
Staffordshire Police	23	3%
North Wales Police	22	3%
Metropolitan Police Service	20	2%
Northamptonshire Police	20	2%
Thames Valley Police	20	2%
West Mercia Police	20	2%
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	19	2%
Durham Constabulary	18	2%
Hertfordshire Constabulary	18	2%
Sussex Police	16	2%
Cumbria Constabulary	16	2%
Cleveland Police	16	2%

Avon and Somerset Constabulary	14	2%
Gloucestershire Constabulary	14	2%
Hampshire Constabulary	14	2%
Wiltshire Police	14	2%
Lancashire Constabulary	13	2%
Norfolk Constabulary	12	1%
Cheshire Constabulary	10	1%
North Yorkshire Police	10	1%
Gwent Police	9	1%
Leicestershire Police	9	1%
Suffolk Constabulary	9	1%
Dorset Police	8	1%
Essex Police	8	1%
Bedfordshire Police	7	1%
Warwickshire Police	7	1%
Lincolnshire Police	6	1%
Surrey Police	4	0%
Dyfed-Powys Police	2	0%
Not known	12	1%
	<b>810</b>	<b>100%</b>

Greater Manchester Police was reported in 71 newspaper reports, representing 9 per cent of the sample alone (see table 9). Indeed, table ten shows the range of cases prosecuted across police force areas. Taken with table nine, this is not explained by size of population.

**Table 10: Number of cases across police force areas**

Number of cases	Number of police force areas
1-10	13
11-20	16
21-30	9
31-40	4
70+	1

## Prosecution of cases by court

Four per cent of cases were heard in a Magistrate's Court. 86 per cent of cases were heard in a Crown Court, indicating their seriousness, and in ten per cent of cases this information was not reported.

## Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence cases prosecuted as a 'standalone' offence

Less than a third (31%, n=250) of Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence cases were prosecuted as a standalone crime. Those cases that were, reflected a good understanding of economic abuse which was recognised by the courts.

**"Summarising the facts, Recorder [name] said that the [two] assault allegations 'encompassed' the single charge of controlling and coercive behaviour" (2021:72).**

The remaining two-thirds (69%, n=560) were charged alongside at least one more criminal offence (see table 11).

**Table 11: Additional charges brought alongside the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence, broken down across IPV and AFV**

Type of charge	% of all cases	IPV	AFV
<b>Sample size</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>686</b>	<b>35</b>
ABH/GBH/Section 20 assault	51.9%	52.6%	48.6%
Criminal damage/property damage	10.1%	11.1%	8.6%
Threatening behaviour/fear/serious distress/threats to a life	8.3%	8.0%	17.1%
Rape/sexual assault	7.7%	5.4%	0.0%
Breach of order	4.6%	5.0%	2.9%
Perverting the course of justice	4.1%	4.2%	2.9%
Stalking	2.8%	2.9%	2.9%
False imprisonment	2.7%	2.3%	0.0%
Harassment	2.6%	2.2%	2.9%
Physical or sexual harm to child	2.5%	1.9%	2.9%
Possession of drugs/other drug related offence	2.5%	2.2%	2.9%
Possession of weapon	1.6%	1.6%	2.9%
Malicious communication	1.4%	1.5%	0.0%
Theft	1.1%	0.9%	5.7%
Disclosing of sexual photograph	1.0%	1.2%	0.0%
Kidnapping	0.7%	0.7%	0.0%
Burglary/aggravated burglary	0.7%	0.7%	0.0%
Fraud	0.7%	0.6%	2.9%
Arson	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%
Manslaughter	0.2%	0.3%	0.0%
Robbery	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%
Poisoning (administer obnoxious substance)	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%

As table 11 also reveals, over half of all Controlling or Coercive Behaviour cases (52%, n=420) were brought alongside offences involving physical abuse in the form of actual bodily harm (ABH), grievous bodily harm (GBH) or seriously harming a victim without intent (section 20). In addition, rape and sexual assault were charged alongside Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in nearly 8 per cent (n=62) of cases. Manslaughter charges featured within the intimate partner violence sample only.

**Table 12: Additional charges brought alongside the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence in known economic abuse cases**

Type of charge	Non-EA cases (n)	%	EA cases (n)	%
<b>Sample size</b>	<b>293</b>		<b>517</b>	
ABH/GBH/Section 20 assault	149	50.9%	271	52.4%
Criminal damage/property damage	12	4.1%	70	13.5%
Threatening behaviour/fear/serious distress/threats to life	26	8.9%	41	7.9%
Rape/sexual assault	34	11.6%	28	5.4%
Breach	13	4.4%	24	4.6%
Perverting the course of justice	18	6.1%	15	2.9%
Stalking	5	1.7%	18	3.5%
False imprisonment	11	3.8%	11	2.1%
Harassment	8	2.7%	13	2.5%
Physical or sexual harm to a child (Separate charges after initial analysis)	14	4.8%	6	1.2%



Possession of drugs/other drug related offence	8	2.7%	12	2.3%
Possession of weapon	6	2.0%	7	1.4%
Malicious communication	4	1.4%	7	1.4%
Theft	0	0.0%	9	1.7%
Disclosing of sexual photograph	4	1.4%	4	0.8%
Kidnapping	1	0.3%	5	1.0%
Burglary/Aggravated burglary	3	1.0%	3	0.6%
Fraud	1	0.3%	5	1.0%
Arson	1	0.3%	1	0.2%
Manslaughter	0	0.0%	2	0.4%
Robbery	1	0.3%	1	0.2%
Poisoning (administer obnoxious substance)	0	0.0%	1	0.2%

It is interesting to note that charges related to rape and sexual assault, perverting the course of justice and physical or sexual harm to a child were more likely to be reported in the media reports alongside the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence where no examples of economic control were described.

Unsurprisingly, offences linked to economic abuse such as criminal damage/property damage, theft, and fraud were all more commonly charged alongside the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence in the known economic abuse cases compared to those Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence reports which did not describe economic abuse. For example, criminal/property damage was charged in 13.5 per cent (n=70) of the sample where economic abuse was reported compared to 4 per cent (n=12) of cases where it was not.

Few reports stated what criminal/property damage related to. Two cases related to the victim-survivor's property; one case involved a front door; one case involved a window; one case involved a fence; three cases related to a mobile phone; one case involved a television; and two cases related to a car.

In some cases, the criminal damage charge was linked to family members and friends of the victim-survivor or, in others, neighbours and bystanders. One perpetrator threw a tin of white gloss paint over machinery at a business owned by a member of the victim's family, causing thousands of pounds of damage. This was a result of the victim-survivor refusing his demands to give him £30. In this case the perpetrator also caused damage to a car belonging to a family member by walking over the bonnet and roof, again after a demand for money from the victim-survivor was refused. In another case, the perpetrator threatened to damage the house belonging to his partner's parents as well as throw acid in her face if she told the police about his abusive behaviour.

## Reporting economic abuse to the police

The newspaper reports suggested that the victim-survivors in the known economic abuse cases did not initially report economic abuse to the police, rather they reported an 'emergency' that required immediate police intervention. This was certainly the case for the four women interviewed.

**"I was reporting to the police in 2017 for threats to kill... you know, when you reach out to the police for help and support, you're at the end of the tether, there's many incidents prior to that but due the fear and intimidation, I was told, always told, that if I called the police, he'd kill me. Then that event happened, I reported it, but there were many events before that... He sat me down very calmly and said, 'If you ever report me to the police again, you're dead'. In a very calm, cool manner, but it was the stare, it was the intimidation of it. And then in 2018 in the summertime, I just fled with the clothes on my back. The fear, the bullying, the intimidation, the abuse was just every day. And I just left with the clothes on my back and reported to the police" (Krystal).**

"I couldn't deal with it anymore. It was the last event that happened. I tried to put some documents together. I usually keep everything in one folder, but [daughter's] passport and birth certificate were missing. At that moment, I knew this was not safe anymore. He might run off with my little girl, or something terrible may happen. He had [daughter] in his arms and went to the bedroom. I am following him, yelling, 'You are not taking her anywhere; do you not understand that?'. He keeps slapping the door on me, calling me names, and telling me to f\*\*\* off and stop following him. Then he opened the door and punched me straight in the eyes. I realised that one day I was going to be dead. Two, three days later I took my passport, birth certificate, Home Office documents and [daughter's] red book with me to work. I had to hide them in different parts of my handbag. [He] had dropped [daughter] at the nursery that morning. I had left for work before then, as usual. With the help of my work colleagues, police and friends, we planned a safe way out. I picked [daughter] up from nursery and we got on the train to my friend's. The police came straight there to do all the interviews and stuff like that. It was the hardest day of my life" (Eva).

"I was being treated privately through my work health insurance for multiple post-traumatic brain injuries caused by him and one evening was hit by a car when crossing the road. They managed to get me to an NHS hospital. And he came and basically forced a discharge because he panicked because of the injuries he was giving me, that something would go on to the NHS records and it would trigger an investigation. He refused to get food for me, and I couldn't use my phone and I said please, please give me something I can't move. [He] basically said, you're wasting money and I'm not going to. And then I went to bed crying, hungry, fell asleep. And then the next morning [he] started saying I'd ruined his entertainment for the weekend. He assaulted me and said 'I'm gonna kill you'. And I don't know how I survived that attack, physical attack. [He] took my phone which was sort of my lifeline. And he, he took my phone, and he threw it. And I was on the floor, I'd been thrown down the stairs. And I don't know how I managed to grab it. But I managed to grab it and I called 999. And I said, you need to get here because either, he's going to kill me. Or, you know, I'm just I'm not going to make it through because like I can't, my body's gone, I can't feel it. And I'm just in agony, and I'm not breathing properly. And one way or the other, I'm not going to survive, but you need to know it's him. It's because of him" (Irya).

"So, his behaviour, I think, sort of got worse and worse and worse over a couple of years in the run up to this one particular night...I think what had happened was about six months prior, I told him that I wanted a divorce and that our relationship was over. And I think that worsened his behaviour, it made him tighten his grip, it accelerated the sort of the jealousy and the possessiveness. And to a point when there's one particular day, as I say, I've gone to work as normal, he started drinking. And during the course of the morning, the phone calls... becoming increasingly abusive. It got to the end of the school day, so I was still in work and my kids basically got home. He was there. He was clearly drunk and volatile-... they were ringing me then by about seven o'clock that evening, they said, 'Look, for God's sakes, don't come home.' I told him that I was I was frightened, I didn't want to come home, I was gonna stay with a friend. And over the course of that night, then he rang me. I mean, it was hundreds and hundreds of times, and he was, you know, threatening he was going to kill himself. And then if I did come home, going to kill me. It took until about eight o'clock the following morning for me to ring the police. And the strange thing is, I didn't really know what I was ringing the police for. All I knew is that I needed help I needed to get back into the house needs to make sure my kids right, I knew my kids were okay. But I was too frightened to go back into that house knowing he was there" (Ruth).

Chapter one of the report highlights research which suggests that victim-survivors are more at risk of both homicide and suicide when economic abuse is experienced within high levels of coercive control. Nearly one in ten Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence cases (8%, n=41) were prosecuted alongside charges linked to threatening behaviour/fear/serious distress/threats to a life.

Qualitative analysis of the known economic abuse cases found descriptions within media reports which reflected this, including threats to kill, the use of weapons and strangulation.

**"He pulled out a rusty blade, 10 to 12 inches long, which he threatened her with, saying: 'Where's the f\*\*\*ing money?' (2020:27).**

**"They started arguing about money and he pushed his forehead into her face saying he would kill her" (2020:78)**

**"Sentencing [defendant] Judge [name] went through the instances of violence and humiliation which also involved [him] making the victim sit in a chair and slapping her face from side to side after she asked for a SIM card back; 'she describes that if she didn't bring you money then you'd flip. You regularly strangled her to the point she saw stars and you had no regard for her feelings, needs or safety'" (2022:110).**

**"In another message, he threatened to kill her before begging for money and blaming her for the breakdown of their relationship" (2022:117).**

**"[He] asked her how much money she had made that day begging on the streets. When she told him he said it wasn't enough and punched her, strangled her until she felt dizzy and stamped on her head" (2021:60).**

One manslaughter charge was brought within the known economic abuse sample in intimate partner violence cases, whilst in another case an inquest ruled that the victim was unlawfully killed following the perpetrator's abuse. It is thought to be the first time an inquest has ruled this in the case of a death by suicide following domestic abuse. The text box below provides details of how the abuse led both victims to take their own lives by hanging.

**"I've run out of fight."**

Justene Reece (2017:18)

On sentencing, Judge Michael Chambers QC said Allen had 'clearly caused' Justene to commit suicide and made her life 'a living nightmare'. "It is not suggested that you intended at any time that she should die but clearly you intended that she should suffer serious psychological harm. She committed suicide as a direct result of your sustained and determined criminal actions - actions which you clearly knew were having a profound effect upon her."

Senior Crown Prosecutor Hannah Sidaway said: "This was an exceptional case. Allen subjected Justene and those close to her to a sustained campaign of torment until she was unable to endure his behaviour any longer. There is no doubt he ultimately caused her to take her own life" she added.

The court heard that after Allen found out about Ms. Reece's death, he looked online to see whether he could be held legally responsible. On 22 February, Ms. Reece's body was found in the kitchen of her home. A consultant psychiatrist who reviewed all the evidence and medical records said she had been in a 'substantially abnormal' mental state, suffering from depression, panic attacks and feelings of hopelessness. Mr. Smith told the court the doctor had concluded there was a "clear link between Ms. Reece's mental state caused by the actions of the defendant and her taking her own life".

**"You... broke her spirits."**

Kellie Sutton (2018:7)

The court heard Ms. Sutton had changed from being a positive and outgoing woman into someone who was anxious, quiet, and increasingly isolated from her friends. She was found unconscious after attempting to take her own life and never regained consciousness and life support was withdrawn three days later.

Medical records showed she had been to hospital with a 3cm wound to the top of her head and police were called to reports of a row at her home. She later told a family member [perpetrator] had thrown her on the floor and choked her because she had gone out and not told him where she was. She told others he was abusive, jealous, possessive, and controlling.

When passing the sentence for charges of controlling or coercive behaviour and assault, Judge Philip Grey said: "Your behaviour drove Kellie Sutton to hang herself that morning. You beat her and ground her down and broke her spirits". A previous inquest found that Ms Sutton had died by suicide, but this was overturned in a second inquest which found she was unlawfully killed. Coverage described how her family fought for the second inquest and they described the ruling as "groundbreaking".

A third case involving several victim-survivors reported how one had taken a fatal overdose the day before she was due to give evidence in court (2020:18).

**"His relentless behaviour left me feeling like there was no way out" (2020:7).**

In a further 6 per cent (n=29) of known economic abuse cases, media reports stated that victim-survivors had either considered (n=15) or tried taking their own life (n=14) because of the abuse they endured. Where it was reported, attempted suicide methods included overdoses and cutting wrists.

**"I was financially and economically controlled and physically abused for every penny. I was afraid to leave because I didn't have the financial independence and I was frightened of the repercussions he threatened, [He] had taken out life insurance policies in my name...and he threatened to benefit by pushing me to suicide. I couldn't comprehend the level of detail to which he had planned for my life ending, the financial gains to him and the network of sympathy and support he had mapped out from my potential death" (Iyra).**

## Disclosures of economic abuse

Media reports indicated that economic abuse was disclosed after the police became involved.

**"Concerned neighbours called the police when they heard the victim-survivor screaming. Attending police officers spoke to the couple who claimed they had 'just been arguing about money'. However, the victim-survivor went on to disclose that her partner subjected her to degrading treatment, including taking her wages and limiting her access to food" (2019:76).**

**"The victim-survivor was later to tell the police that during the course of their relationship, the offender controlled her bank account, and made her pay for everything. He threw away her make up, cut up her belongings and took her mobile phone" (2019:77).**

Interviews with the four victim-survivors also suggested that they did not themselves recognise their experience as economic abuse within a pattern of coercive control until after they had reported.

**"Not particularly in those terms [coercive control]. When he was arrested and charged under that, obviously I looked it up and was like, 'Oh my god, there's an actual law!' around controlling and coercive behaviour that was introduced in 2015, and literally, going through it, I was like 'This is - do they know this person?', it was like everything that I was experiencing. So no, at the time of fleeing I just said to the police 'I need help, please can you help me. I fear that if I don't get help, I'm not going to be here anymore, he's going to kill me' (Krystal).**

**"To be honest, I didn't realise really. I knew there was this was abuse. I knew this was not normal. But I wasn't aware of a lot of things until I started working with the police. They didn't really ask anything about that [economic abuse] but they did question who paid – actually, they asked me once who paid for a trip to [country]. And I paid for everything. So, they asked me once who paid for things" (Eva).**

I knew that I was paying for the grocery shopping, and he would, he would go berserk if I took, you know, a packet of crisps and cereal bars from home for lunch, which were things that I was paying for, saying you're taking things out of the house and wasting money. But I didn't know it was economic abuse, you know, him breaking my phone. Whilst I was at my graduation, he completely sabotaged my car" (Irya).

"I got a visit from a Family Liaison police officer, and she basically handed me this book. It was like, it was like an Idiot's Guide to domestic abuse and coercive control. Okay, and it was only when I kind of flipped through that I realised this is this, this is what's been going on. So, you know, and he pretty much ticked every single box in that booklet... and in the course of being interviewed, other things came out and you know... those initial interviews where you don't quite know what information they're after, and how much you should tell, you know, it was all a bit of a mystery, really" (Ruth).

## Evidencing economic abuse

The way in which the media reported the known economic abuse cases suggests that economic abuse was commonly evidenced via witness statements made by the victim-survivor or someone else with relevant knowledge.

Two media reports highlighted how the perpetrator recognised this and had sought to financially bribe the victim-survivor not to testify; in one case he sent her text messages offering to give her money; in the other he offered the victim-survivor and her mother 'money not to go to court and give evidence.'

**"After he attacked her twice in successive months, [he] deposited £10,000 in her bank account, described in court as a 'bribe' to keep her quiet, but she immediately returned the cash" (2022:17)**

However, a new precedent was set in one case through securing a conviction for controlling or coercive behaviour on hearsay evidence from a midwife, a medical professional, social services, and the police. The perpetrator removed his partner from her supported accommodation where she was living and made her live on the streets. He spent her benefits, held her bank card and forced her to shoplift. He also sold her mobile phone (2018:4).

Several media reports did mention that evidence of economic abuse was found during the investigation. For example, one report stated that the perpetrator had his wife's bank card on him when he was arrested. Another stated that the police found the victim-survivor's bank card at the perpetrator's home. There was evidence that another perpetrator had fraudulently used the victim-survivor's credit card at a service station.

In one case, a screen shot of a text message was shared within the media report itself showing how the perpetrator demanded that £400 be put into his bank account and threatening the victim-survivor that she would 'not be a pretty sight' if she did not comply. Whilst some media reports were not clear what exactly they evidenced, other mechanisms were mentioned, including mobile phone recordings, logs, pictures, and emails.

Several of the interviewees explained that, although they had evidence about economic abuse experienced, the police were uninterested in using it.

**"It's not the obvious signs, you need to look outside the box, the phone records, the bank statements. You know, all those kind of things that would...show red flags. I said to the police that I'm willing to hand over all my bank statements and everything because it, all bills and everything except for one were in my name. Loans he took out were all in my name. A car he took out was all in my name. I said obviously I've got proof of all this. I don't believe they understood the financial side as much as what they should have done...I don't feel that the police perhaps felt that they**



could do much about that. Because you know I said I'll give over my bank information and my statements and stuff and they were like, no there's no need" (Krystal).

"And I think, because there were other things going on, and there was physical sort of abuse that took precedence over this. You know, that was more important to the police. Almost like the economics the financial side of it... because actually, we found bags and bags of paperwork, and what they said was, we'll deal with that another time, so it was very much on the sidelines. Because actually, that will complicate matters, what we want to focus on are the core issues, the rape charges, the harassment, stalking, so in a sense, I think the police response was sort of, we'll come back to that. So, they weren't using it to build the case...Yeah, they felt that actually, what that would do is... take away from the sort of the core charges" (Ruth).

## Defendant pleas

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of the defendants plead guilty. Two in ten (20%) plead not guilty and in 7 per cent of cases the plea was not recorded.

In the known economic abuse cases, nearly eight in ten defendants (78%) plead guilty<sup>13</sup>. Since the case would not, therefore, have gone on to be heard in court, it can only be assumed that many of the details of economic abuse reported by the press were taken from the victim personal statement shared with the court before sentencing. This is because the victim personal statement is an opportunity for the survivor to tell the court how the crime has not only impacted them physically and emotionally, but also financially.

**"In my victim impact statement, I wrote that. I wrote that financial abuse has, is a big problem, and that all bills and stuff is in my name and I'm in so much debt because of it" (Krystal).**

The four in-depth interviews conducted as part of this research highlighted that the practice of bringing other offences alongside the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence rather than 'encompassing' the behaviours they addressed within it, led to plea bargaining. The dropping of additional charges created a sense of injustice for the women involved.

**"So, when he was arrested, he was arrested for controlling or coercive behaviour and GBH. That was downgraded to ABH with assault...and so, when the police notified me, he had pleaded guilty to controlling or coercive behaviour, I asked about the other charge. They went away and came back and said to me 'We're extremely sorry, the CPS have dropped it, the day before he was in court for his plea'. They sent the letter to say this to the address I fled from. So, I had no idea that that had been dropped. There's kind of... talk about plea bargaining... if you plead guilty to this, we'll drop this. I mean, how is that right? I appealed it, and I was told by the CPS they weren't going to review the assault charge because he's got a conviction for controlling or coercive behaviour. And I was like, that's a separate offence... it just feels so utterly disappointing that the evidence is all there...the injury that I had was a really serious fracture" (Krystal).**

**"I think there were like almost a dozen charges of assault, which they could prove through the medical records, but he basically got to negotiate. And he said, "Well, I will plead guilty for you. Let me accept three of the charges of assault within the CCB. And you let go of the rest". And then the CPS guy said, 'Oh, great, we've got a guilty plea. Fantastic. Let's take it and let's go for it'. And they basically said to me to get a guilty plea is really hard. You know, we've got the guilty plea. Let's take it otherwise, you know, it's going to be more time and money and probably no outcome for all of us. So, you don't really have a say I didn't feel it was true, that it was justice. But I think true justice would have looked slightly different" (Irya)**



"I was doing it [giving evidence] via video. They finally got the link working and I think what happened was my face must have flashed up into the court. Right? At which point he realised that I was actually there and that this was actually happening because that's when they came in with a plea deal...there are these five charges... I was told if he takes coercive control and stalking then you know that's the offer. I couldn't consult with anybody. There was no one there for me to talk to. In that moment... I had to decide. And then I either put myself and my family and everybody else through a three-week court case, or I take this offer. I took the offer because I was just so frightened by the whole thing. I didn't want to do it. And a little bit of me now thinks was that the right thing to do? Should I have gone for it? Should I have seen the trial through?" (Ruth).

## Previous convictions

---

Due to the nature of media reports, previous convictions were only noted in 37 per cent (n=300) of cases.

**"[Name] had 28 previous convictions for 57 offences, including 12 for assault the majority of which were against women. He also had restraining orders against him for five different women" (2018:19).**

There were at least 10 examples of offenders who had previously been convicted of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence itself.

## Sentencing

---

Three-quarters (n=611) of perpetrators received a custodial sentence, 15 per cent received a suspended sentence. Slightly more perpetrators (18%, n=95) received a suspended sentence in the known economic abuse cases.

The mean prison length was just under two years (23 months). The average prison length for cases in which more than one offence was proven was nearly twice that at nearly four years (47 months). Three of these prison sentences were life sentences.

In one in ten cases (n=94), a community order was made. Perpetrators known to use economic control were more likely than those who did not to receive a community order at 12 per cent (compared to seven per cent).

## Restraining orders

---

In half of cases (50%, n= 409) a restraining order was issued. The mean restraining order length was 6.4 years and the percentage of indefinite or lifetime restraining orders was 28 per cent (n=113).

## Perpetrator programmes

---

Where it was known, 12 per cent of perpetrators (n=94) were ordered to attend some type of course or programme to address their behaviour. 6.5 per cent were ordered to undertake the Building Better Relationships<sup>14</sup> programme and 0.2 per cent another form of domestic abuse programme.

**"[Name] who had pleaded guilty to engaging in controlling and coercive behaviour and common assault was ordered to complete a Building Better Relationships programme after the court heard he held 'old-fashioned' views of women" (2020:15).**

## Rehabilitation programmes

---

Where it was known, rehabilitation programmes were ordered in 9.2 per cent of cases.

## Fines/costs/compensation/victim surcharge

---

One in ten (n=84) perpetrators were issued a fine or ordered to pay costs, compensation, or a victim surcharge.

The issue of compensation is explored further within chapter six which presents a detailed analysis of the examples of economic abuse reported within the media reports.

A low-angle, close-up photograph of a woman with dark, wavy hair. She is looking upwards and to the left, with her right hand resting on her forehead. The background is a clear, bright blue sky. The lighting is warm, suggesting a sunny day. The woman's expression is contemplative or perhaps distressed, given the context of the text.

# **Chapter five:**

## **How economic abuse is 'seen' within media reports**

## Chapter five: How economic abuse is 'seen' within media reports

As noted in the methodology chapter, examples of economic abuse were identified within media reports of successfully prosecuted cases of controlling or coercive behaviour. These examples were then categorised according to whether they impacted a victim-survivor's ability to acquire, use or maintain economic resources.

### Recognition of economic abuse

---

Nearly two-thirds (54%, n=517) of the media reports referenced economic abuse. Of this subsample, one example of economic abuse was contained in 61 per cent of cases (n=316); two behaviours in 32 per cent of cases (n=165); and three behaviours in 7 per cent of cases (n=36).

Perhaps reflecting increased awareness of economic abuse from January 2019, some media commentary explicitly recognised and named these behaviours as financial or economic control or abuse.

**"We say that keeping hold of the purse strings in this way was one way of exercising control over her" (2017:7).**

**"He also financially abused the long-term partner, causing her to build up £50,000 worth of debt" (2017:30).**

**"There was also financial control. She would withdraw her benefit money and have to hand it to the defendant, so she rarely had any money left for herself" (2018:39).**

**"His controlling behaviour meant she left her job and became financially dependent on him, with money due to be paid to her being redirected into his own bank account" (2019:31).**

**"He also controlled the victim's finances, transferring money from her bank account into his own, at times leaving her unable to pay for food and bills, he effectively cut off her independence" (2019:37).**

**"[His] 'economic control' of her included taking thousands of pounds of her own money. He would buy himself expensive items and give her much cheaper ones" (2019:85)**

**"With the financial exploitation under way, [he] also began to exert control over the most routine daily activities, including what she ate and when she slept" (2021:100).**

Examples of economic abuse within the media reports were most often linked to control over a victim-survivors' ability to use economic resources (64%, n=329). Control over a victim-survivors' ability to maintain economic resources followed (49%, n=253); with control over a victim-survivors' ability to acquire economic resources least likely to feature (30%, n=153).

Qualitative analysis of the behaviours identified is presented below, organised by 'targets of control'. The 2017 **Into Plain Sight** report organised the examples according to the acquire, use, or maintain categories; however, in practice they overlap – as do the strategies of restriction, exploitation and sabotage. Organising behaviours in this way makes clearer the range of stakeholders who need to recognise and respond to economic abuse.

### Targets of control

---

#### Control over education

**"He controls everything I do. I have asked to go to college, and he has stopped me from bettering myself. If it wasn't for someone calling the police, I believe he would have killed me" (2021:50).**

News reports described perpetrators preventing victim-survivors from going to college and university. As well as 'forbidding' them to attend, behaviours included hiding visas and personal documents needed to apply.

Behaviours also interfered with the ability of victim-survivors to succeed in and maintain education. These included breaking their laptops, preventing them from reading, hiding their course work, making the victim-survivor late or doing things to prevent them from attending classes.

In one case, the perpetrator smashed three of the victim-survivor's laptops, an iPad and seven phones. This led her to have to rewrite a master's dissertation which could not be retrieved from one of the broken devices. In another, the perpetrator prevented the victim-survivor from sitting her exams. In yet another case, a physical assault left the victim unable to see properly the following day when she sat her law exams.

## **Control over employment**

### **"He made me quit my job and beg with him on the streets" (2017:20).**

As was the case for education, perpetrators refused to let victim-survivors go to work. When one woman stood up to the perpetrator saying she wanted a job he told her she would not be good enough. Another perpetrator reportedly told one woman who wanted to get a job that he would 'dismantle' her face if she did not do as she was told. It was reported that some victim-survivors were also forced to give up/resign from jobs they already had, sometimes on multiple occasions. One news report stated:

### **"He would stop her going to work telling her that her work didn't matter. But, if she didn't work, he would accuse her of not contributing to household bills" (2021:14).**

In one case the perpetrator called the victim-survivor's employer and told them that she had quit and would not be coming back. Another victim-survivor was manipulated into giving up her job when the perpetrator told her he had secured a new position for her with the local council. He created a fake email account from the local authority and even came home with a work badge in his partner's name along with training and induction materials. One perpetrator told his partner not to get a new job when she was made redundant and criticised her so much that she gave up her business. Several victim-survivors gave up well paid jobs and their own businesses after being convinced to move in with the perpetrator.

### **"I had my daughter, so I had to stop working, he wouldn't let me go back to work" (2018:47).**

Several victim-survivors described how they were not allowed to go back to work after taking maternity leave. This included one perpetrator discouraging a victim-survivor from having a career, instead saying she should stay at home to look after their children. It is interesting to note that one victim-survivor described how arguments 'around money' started when she was pregnant with their first child. In a second case, arguments 'over finances' started soon after their first child was born.

Perpetrators thwarted their partner's ambitions in other ways. They interfered with job applications. One news report described how, when the perpetrator discovered that the victim-survivor had applied for a job, he became 'enraged', tore up the application form, and held a knife to her throat. In another news report, the victim-survivor had dressed smartly for a job interview but was left unable to attend after the perpetrator threw coffee over her and ruined her clothes. One perpetrator ripped up the passport his partner had got for a job interview and then sent her a video of him doing so. A passport was taken from another two victim-survivors – one of whom needed it for work. The perpetrator used it to 'hold her to ransom.' One perpetrator took away his partner's national insurance documents.

In those cases where a victim-survivor could work, the perpetrator interfered with their ability to maintain their employment. In one case, a victim-survivor was made to reduce her hours at work, in another they were forbidden from working late or working overtime. In a third, the victim-survivor was made to leave one job and start another.

There were reports of the perpetrator seeking to prevent their partner going to work. One woman lost her job after the perpetrator refused to let her go to work, smacking her on the side of her mouth before



screaming in her face. Physical restraint was also reported. When one victim-survivor took up the role of shop assistant, she was falsely imprisoned in the back of the perpetrator's van for four days. In one case the perpetrator physically prevented his partner from going to work by locking all the doors of their house. Another perpetrator would take the keys to the woman's car, leaving her unable to get to work and to university, another had the same effect by letting her car tyres down. There were reports of the perpetrator ripping work clothes, including an ambulance service uniform.

Abusive behaviours in the workplace also sabotaged victim-survivors' employment. One perpetrator would go to her place of work and demand she come home during her breaks – this caused her to lose her employment. In a second case, the perpetrator continuously harassed his partner's work colleagues, again causing her to lose her job. In a third the perpetrator regularly confronted customers and staff in his partner's workplace and became aggressive if anyone challenged him, forcing the woman to leave her job. In another news report it was stated that the perpetrator sent abusive text messages to the victim-survivor's manager accusing him of 'showing an interest in her' leading her to have to leave. Constantly being messaged at work led several victim-survivors to give up work.

In yet another case, the perpetrator forced the victim-survivor to get a tattoo on her neck. She begged him not to as she would not be allowed to have a tattoo at work. One perpetrator threatened to make up bogus allegations of misconduct and report them to the victim-survivor's employer so that she would lose her job, a threat that he had successfully carried out against a former partner. A victim-survivor ended up losing her job at a pharmacy when her partner turned up at her work and falsely accused her of stealing drugs. It was reported that another perpetrator sent messages to his partner's employer claiming she was an alcoholic.

Perpetrators also created situations which forced victim-survivors to miss work, again putting their employment at risk. One woman described how she was forced to cancel around 50 shifts in her job as a care worker. Another explained that she was forced to 'pull sickies' from work. Two victim-survivors were forced to take days off work by the perpetrator whilst recovering from visible injuries inflicted by him so that work colleagues did not see them.

**"When I got pregnant, he decided to go to university and quit his job and go part-time. I don't even know if he was working properly or not because I was always in work. I was always working a lot until our daughter was born, I was paying for most of that stuff. And then when she was born, he didn't want me to work on like two days, so I had to pack my 30 hours into the three days. Every time I was offered a promotion he started swearing and cursing me. If ever I mentioned getting more working hours or an extra day to progress in my job for a better wage, his answer would always be the same 'I don't have time for your bulls\*\*\*\*'. He was saying things like, 'You think you are better than me?' When I tried to give my opinion, he would tell me I was not educated enough to comment. On top of this, I was stupid.**

**"Since having [daughter], I had only done a couple of modelling projects. I'd had to ask [him] for permission to do those. On one day before the shoot, [he] told me he had exams and had no time to help with [daughter] after all. Really? A day before the shoot, he told me this. So, I had to sort it out with the nursery myself. And, of course, a few days later, I found out [he] had no exams that day. On another occasion, I had arranged to do a promotional video. Once again, I had to ask for his permission, as we wanted to get ready in our flat. [He] was initially okay with the idea until the day of the shoot arrived. Two hours before everyone was due, [he] went crazy mad, calling me all kinds of names, saying that I was so irresponsible to let strangers in the flat, also people from 'my country'. I cried and begged him on my knees to stop doing this to me; it was stressful and made me seem unprofessional.**

**"I realised that he was claiming stuff in my name. That's why he didn't want me to work more. Before [reporting to the police] I hadn't realised that. He was getting like housing benefits in my name, and for our daughter. When I moved in with him, I thought it was private. So basically, he was using me for many years just for money really. You know, I wasn't able to buy myself like pretty stuff like clothes or things that I used to like to eat. I was always like short of money and just managed to you know how to say, live from one month to another month hardly able to save anything. I've have realised now that I have always paid for everything" (Eva).**



The impact of other forms of control and coercion resulted in victim-survivors having to leave the workplace. In one case the perpetrator would take her finger whilst she was sleeping to unlock her phone and then go through her messages. He would then wake her up and ask who everyone was, keeping her up all night. She became sleep deprived and her work was affected. One victim-survivor could not go to work and lost earnings after the perpetrator took her mattress away (see below).

One woman lost her job when the perpetrator refused to let her leave her own flat. She was so scared she had to move home. In a victim personal statement, a victim-survivor described being so petrified the perpetrator would turn up at her work that she left her job. The prospect of bumping into her abusive partner at work prompted another woman to leave. Similarly, one victim had to leave her job because the defendant arranged for his new partner to start work at the same company. The behaviour of one perpetrator was so obsessive and controlling that the victim-survivor was forced to leave her job, feigning ill health as the reason.

## **Control over income**

**“He always enjoyed watching me beg him to put some money into my account, in order that I would not be overdrawn in my bank account” (2022:30).**

One source of income is through benefit payments. A media report referred to the perpetrator restricting a victim-survivor from acquiring benefits. This was in relation to a threat to get her benefits stopped if she reported the abuse that she was experiencing from him to the police. Another report stated that a perpetrator would accompany his partner to the bank or card machine when her benefits were due and then take them. Perpetrators also took away bank and credit cards or restricted access to personal and joint bank accounts so that victim-survivors could not access benefit payments as well as income from employment.

In one case the perpetrator took his partner's bank card and credit card to work with him so she could not use them. In another the perpetrator blocked her bank card. One victim-survivor was given just £10 of her money a week. In another, the perpetrator gave his partner an allowance of £15 a week in two pence pieces.

Several working women were forced to pay their wages into their partners' bank account. In one case, the victim-survivor earned £2,000 a month, but her partner kept all but £500. One victim-survivor described how her partner had exploited his 'power to the max' over a 12-year period, using her earnings to go on exotic holidays, treat himself to designer clothes, fragrances and an expensive watch and get his teeth fixed. He told her he should have control of decisions because she 'did not have the experience he had'.

**“I had no access to the bank account. And it sounds so stupid, doesn't it? You know, people say ‘Well, what do you mean, you didn't have a bank card? What do you mean, you didn't have access to your bank account?’ I just didn't. And at the end of the day, it was easier because you didn't want to, you don't want to get into an argument with him, I didn't want to start a fight. So just learn to kind of keep quiet and say nothing. And that then becomes your normal. And if I if I needed money, then I had to ask for it. And he was very clever, because I think he knew that, for example, a Tesco's meal deal was three pounds. So that's exactly what I had. Because I think if I had any more than that, then it gave me scope to, you know, to go other places. So, I recognise that now. But at the time, that was just my normal if I wanted money, I had to ask for it. I was earning the money, he sort of took the role of I'm sorting the bills. You don't have to worry about it. It's all been sorted. I just assumed that's what he was doing... So, in a sense, I was completely beholden to him” (Ruth).**

The court heard in one case that the victim-survivor did not have a bank account, nor did she have any identification documents to open one. Her money therefore went into her partner's bank account.

Use of money was monitored through checking transactions in bank statements as well as shopping and parking receipts. One victim-survivor had to seek the perpetrator's permission before she could use her bank card. 'Complete' control over finances was commonly reported.

### **"He financially rinsed me' (2022:118).**

There were many examples of perpetrators draining a partner's finances. In these cases, victim-survivors had access to their own money and the potential to use it as they wished, however the perpetrator's behaviour prevented them from doing so.

Tactics which diminished available funds were varied but included: pressuring a partner into lending them money which was never repaid (in one case, £2,700); forcing a partner into handing over their inheritance; demanding a partner share their PIN; and demanding money. In one case the victim-survivor was told to clear her bank account; in another the perpetrator would transfer money from his partner's bank account into his own, at times leaving her unable to pay for food and bills. In a third, several victim-survivors were manipulated into handing over their savings on the promise that there would be a big return, which never emerged.

Yet another tactic was the perpetrator telling his partner he had no bank account and needed to use hers. He would then borrow her debit card to withdraw 'his' money but withdraw her money as well. One perpetrator forced his partner to log in to her online banking via her mobile phone and under pressure, was made to send two transactions totalling £500 into the defendant's bank account. Another demanded the woman's passwords and tried to transfer thousands of pounds from her to him online.

It was reported that one woman was forced to give her partner around £5,000 during their relationship. She shared that 'when she declined, he trashed the room'. In several cases demands for money were linked to the perpetrator using the funds to feed addictions to cigarettes, drugs, and alcohol – and in one case also funding the addictions of the perpetrator's friends. One perpetrator described his ex-partner as 'just someone who funded his drug habit'.

### **"I was his actual slave - but I was actually the one going to work, cooking his tea, paying for the roof over his head because he didn't have a job" (2018:15).**

There were many examples of economic exploitation that involved the perpetrator refusing to cover his own costs or contribute to household costs, even when he had a job. One victim-survivor described how she was made to pay for her partner's mortgage and his children's phone bills.

Another victim-survivor described how she was forced to give her partner hundreds of pounds and was made to pay his bills and buy his food and beer. She noted that she had become his 'skivvy' as she was made to spend so much time on his chores that she barely had time to feed herself.

**"I felt he abused my financial freedom and spending power, as through his control of my salary and personal needs, he gained to benefit. I had the financial burden of servicing the mortgage, utilities, and groceries together with other household maintenance costs.**

**"It was complete control - from penalising me for taking something as basic as cereal bars to the office from home for lunch – to telling me I didn't deserve to celebrate my birthday or that despite working in banking and financial services for 15 years, I had no money management skills and needed to leave my job because I was incompetent. He'd stop me from going to work /social events by arguing with me just before or at the events to ensure that I didn't attend or make me leave early - stopping me from going to work by subjecting me to visible injuries on my face and also persistently pushing me to give up my career as a condition to stay in the marriage and prove myself; repeating that I wasn't deserving/attractive/ intelligent enough for him.**

**I was punished for spending my own salary on necessities for myself and was forced to justify personal spending needs and was having to manage debts that had been built up by him over time." (Irya).**

## Control over credit

**"All my money went on supporting him – he got through £70,000 in three months. I'm still in massive debt [and] he maxed out my credit card" (2019:21).**

Economic control was also linked to using a partner's credit and sabotaging their credit score. Victim-survivors described being forced to take out payday loans, loans, credit cards and telephone contracts for the benefit of their partner. One perpetrator asked the victim-survivor to be a guarantor on loans, but then failed to make the repayments. In one case a victim-survivor was threatened to take out credit at knife point. Another was harassed for the same reason with texts and emails. As one media report stated:

**"She felt pressured into taking a loan...left in thousands of pounds of debt and living in fear due to his controlling and coercive behaviour" (2019:65).**

However, some victims-survivors were unaware that debts had been taken out in their name until after leaving.

**"[Name] told the court via video link she had been left with 'heavy debts' after discovering [he] had borrowed money under both their names" (2021:39).**

The total debt racked up across just seven cases mentioned within media reports was £174,000<sup>15</sup>. In some cases, the perpetrator did not make repayments as a mechanism for control which impacted the victim-survivors' credit rating.

**"The financial side of it, when I reflect back, is a small drip feed effect, 'You need to give me £100', and then they pay slightly a little bit back, never the full, never ever nowhere near the full, and then that kind of gets worse and worse and worse and again, people say to me 'How did he get loans out in your name?' – taking my phone, logging onto my bank, not even mentioning anything until the money was in my account and sent straight to his bank and so the money from the loans went into my bank account and straight out...and that happened three times. Going to order a brand-new car in my name. And I thought there's no way I'm going to get credit for that, it was a £55,000 car, it got accepted. And I remember being told, because I don't need a car, I have a car, and I remember being told 'you will go and sign on that dotted line, I have to have a car' and forced me to go there, and I went to the dealership and obviously I wasn't happy or excited about it because all the money that he'd taken before has never been paid back, so it's just getting larger and larger and larger. So when I reflect back, I had money, a little bit of money aside to do stuff I would like to do, but towards the end, he controlled everything within my banking which is horrendous, but when you're in that situation, when you don't comply, you manage the situation that you're in rather than do anything else about it, you just do it, you don't want to be bullied and intimidated, and threatened constantly, so you do it. I felt at the end that I was the sole provider anyway, he would pick and choose as to what days he wanted to go into work. But he didn't, he earned good money as well, I don't know where his money went. It certainly wasn't on the family stuff, and the house and stuff, because when we moved, about 5 months before I fled, he said that he was going to make sure he had the money to pay the rent, and of course he didn't, so I was then going to family, to say 'It's in my name, I need the rent'. Which is horrendous. If we went out to say a night out with friends or dinner or something...he would make me get the cash out, but I wasn't allowed the cash, he had the cash in his pocket because he said it would be embarrassing if he didn't have any money on him. And when we were out, of course, he wanted to buy everyone drinks. Cause it's not his money, is it?" (Krystal).**

## Control over transportation

**'He damaged her car before posting dust caps from the vehicle through her letter box and shouting at her' (2021:14).**

**"[He] jumped up and down on his partner's car while screaming at her, and then swore at a concerned elderly woman who had stopped to check on his partner's welfare" (2022:98).**

Perpetrators monitored the use of cars, including through checking the mileage. Others prevented their partners from using their cars. Another took the car belonging to the victim-survivor and refused to give it back until her sister had paid him £200. Perpetrators would take away car keys. One even went as far as taking the battery out of the car. Another perpetrator refused to insure the car saying it was a 'waste of money'. One victim-survivor was made to give up her car. Several reports stated that the perpetrator stole their partner's car.

In one case the perpetrator crashed the woman's car into a fence. When one woman tried to break up with the perpetrator, the perpetrator smashed their child's car seat to stop her from leaving. Another perpetrator threatened to smash his partner's car windows. One perpetrator chased his ex-partner and their children as she drove away with a hammer, smashing her car mirrors. In a further case the perpetrator poured petrol over his girlfriend's car and threatened to set fire to it.

**"He did deliberate damage. For example, during my graduation ceremony he said he 'couldn't stand the fact' that I would be graduating from such an elite school, and he wanted to teach me a lesson. My recognition, achievement and progress were a threat for him. Within minutes of my graduation ceremony, he called me to say he had crashed my new car and was angry that my employer at the time sponsored my education and gave me a car allowance. I was instantly reduced to tears in front of my classmates, friends and family and had to pay £5,000 for repairs to my car" (Irya).**

### **Control over housing**

**"I'll take your keys, your phone. I've left women black and blue in cars before don't think I can't. I swear, I'll blow your house up" (2016:10).**

Control was exerted over victim-survivors' homes so that they were not allowed to use them in the way they wanted to. There were cases of exploitation where the perpetrator moved in without the victim-survivors' agreement. In one report, it was stated that the perpetrator would ring the doorbell continuously if she did not let him in. Several perpetrators used the context of the Covid-19 pandemic to manipulate the victim-survivor into agreeing to live together.

There were cases of the victim-survivor being thrown out of their homes for periods of time. One woman described how she would come home from work to find herself locked out and would have to sit in the garage until she was allowed back in again. This led her to leave some keys with her neighbours, but the perpetrator would leave keys on the inside of locks to stop her entering. In another case the perpetrator would throw the woman out of the house on cold nights. In a third, the perpetrator would throw the victim-survivor out into the rain.

In the ultimate act of sabotage, perpetrators variously threatened to set fire to the victim-survivors' house or blow it up. In one of these cases, the perpetrator had previously been given a suspended prison sentence for threatening to burn down his ex-partner's house with her in it.

### **Control over utilities**

**"When I put the heating on, he woke up and beat me up for making him too hot" (2018:45).**

There were reports of victim-survivors not being allowed to freely use utilities such as heating, water, electricity, and the internet.

One perpetrator took away control of the boiler. Others were reported to turn off the electricity and controls were put on the use of heating. One victim-survivor shared that she was forced to take cold showers for 18 months because the perpetrator insisted that the broken boiler remain unfixed.

It was reported that some victim-survivors were unable to take a shower or a bath without permission. In one case a perpetrator would not allow his partner to bathe on her own and would sit on the toilet seat watching her. He would dictate when she got out, meaning that she would not have time to wash her hair. The perpetrator would say that at least with greasy hair, no one would 'fancy her'.



Media reports shared details of restrictions around the use of the internet. One woman was simply not allowed to use the internet. Another was thrown out of her home for doing so. A third was not allowed to use the internet unsupervised and all technology would be unplugged by the perpetrator when it was not in use. In one case the perpetrator disconnected the internet.

### **Control over mobile phones**

**“Five of the phones didn’t work – then a stranger found me sobbing in the middle of the street. She could tell what was going on from the state of my ears, they were all black and blue” (2016:2).**

There were examples of phones being ‘seized’ or ‘confiscated’ so that the perpetrator could monitor the content, preventing the victim-survivor from speaking to friends and family or calling the police for help. In one case, the perpetrator would take his partner’s phone from her whenever he left the house. Perpetrators also changed the access code on victim-survivors’ phones. Another theme was preventing the victim-survivor from being able to charge their phone.

Yet another perpetrator controlled how his partner used her phone – she was not allowed to take it into another room without him present. Victim-survivors further reported perpetrators removing access to social media accounts from their phones, as well as ordering them to do so.

There was extensive reference within media reports to perpetrators smashing their partner’s phone. In some cases, it was reported that their phone had been smashed on ‘a number of occasions’. One report stated that this happened three times, another reported the phone being smashed on four occasions. In several cases the phone was bent by the perpetrator, cracking the screen and in one case, the SIM card was broken.

In one case the perpetrator sold his partner’s phone. Another simply made the victim-survivor ‘get rid’ of her phone. One perpetrator barged into the victim-survivors’ home and stole her mobile phone. A further media report described how the perpetrator dropped the woman’s phone down a drain. One perpetrator insisted the phone contracts were in his name and cancelled them at whim.

### **Control over other forms of technology**

Control over other forms of technology was reported. Perpetrators were reported to control the use of televisions through taking away the remote control, controlling what programmes were watched and, in one case, banishing the victim-survivor to rooms with no television as a punishment.

Televisions were sold by the perpetrator or smashed. One victim-survivor shared that her partner also sold the lawnmower and strimmer along with her pots and pans. I-pods were smashed, and computers disposed of. A microwave was thrown out of a window and hair straighteners were damaged, as was a hairdryer.

### **Control over home contents and personal possessions**

**“[He] was physically abusive towards me and my property, smashing up things in my bedroom” (2020:26).**

Property within the home was also controlled. In one case the perpetrator threatened to give the house keys to someone to burgle his partner’s house. In another case, the victim-survivor was told that if she left, he would trash the property, her clothes and pour paint on the carpets if she did not return. When one woman left and reported the perpetrator to the police, he accused her of being ‘a grass’, trashing her home and damaging her children’s toys.

**“It was terrible. We could only watch television with the sound turned down. He would kick doors and throw chairs around” (2018:18).**

In several cases, victim-survivors stated that their partner would smash plates and throw crockery around the house, smash up furniture, cause damage to rooms, punch holes in the wall, smash windows and ‘mess up’ the house. In one reported incident the perpetrator strangled his partner before trashing

her room. One perpetrator would threaten to damage property 'if she defied him'. In one case a perpetrator caused 'significant damage' to a bathroom when the victim-survivor locked herself inside and tried to call police.

When one victim-survivor went to get herself a replacement phone, she came back to a 'scene of chaos' discovering that the perpetrator had thrown milkshake all over the walls, poured coca cola in her bed, squirted washing up liquid all over the kitchen and windows, and punched holes in the living room door. Another woman reported that the perpetrator threw gloss paint across her bedroom walls, caused damage elsewhere in the house including the bathroom, damaged the television and several mirrors and left paint footsteps across her home.

**"He wouldn't let me sleep in his bed or the sofa as he said they belong to him" (2018:51).**

Victim-survivors were forced to sleep on the floor depriving them of sleep. In one case the perpetrator would not let his partner sleep in his bed or on the sofa, saying they belonged to him. In another case the perpetrator made his partner sleep on the floor whilst he slept in the bed next to her.

**"I was regularly assaulted until my clothes were torn and my entire body was covered in marks, and I was left to sleep on the bare floor, without meals and declined access to medical help or even painkillers in the house – all because he believed and stressed I 'deserved it' because I didn't satisfy his expectations of being a 'good Indian wife'" (Iyra).**

It was reported that a perpetrator urinated on the duvet and then threw freezing cold water over his partner as she was sleeping. Another reported case outlined how the victim-survivor would be tipped out of bed when she did not get up when her partner asked. One woman was forced to sleep in her car. One perpetrator would order his partner to take off her clothes and then force her to sleep naked on the balcony.

### **Control over economic resources with sentimental value**

**"It was like being back in 1930 when I was the housewife and he said if I answered him back, he would smash up my house or break sentimental things like photos and jewellery" (2018:15).**

Threats were made to destroy items which the victim-survivor was emotionally attached to. One perpetrator texted his partner when she was at work to tell her he was in her home and was going to destroy all her pictures. Several perpetrators tore up novels belonging to the victim-survivor including, in one case, a first edition of a Charles Dickens book. One perpetrator even cut the tops off plants that his partner had been growing, alongside damaging other property.

**"He pawned an awful lot of our personal things, jewellery that my mum had given me, things that belonged to the kids, iPads. I didn't know what he was doing until afterwards, when we found receipts and you know, sort of paperwork from pawn shops and things. I never, I never knew what happened to things and to be honest, I learned not to ask." (Ruth).**

### **Control over economic resources needed to meet personal needs**

Other basic needs were denied. The husband of a disabled victim-survivor turned off the power of her wheelchair. He also put the wheelchair out of her reach. One victim-survivor was made to use buckets to go to the toilet. One was forbidden from using sanitary products without her partner's permission. Another perpetrator would hide his partner's glasses so she could not leave the flat. On one occasion, after a dentist suggested she had a veneer over where her front tooth had been, a victim-survivor was persuaded by her abusive partner to instead have a pallet, which he took away from her straight away, leaving her with a gap in her teeth.

## Control over food and drink

Control was further exerted over food and drink with the perpetrator deciding what their partner could eat and drink and when. In one case the victim-survivor was not allowed to eat any food until she found his wallet or replaced the money that was in it.

Food was linked to appearance, with limitations set around demands about weight. One victim-survivor shared that she was constantly being weighed and was sometimes so hungry that she would 'devour food' her partner threw in the bin. Two victim-survivors were made to eat from the waste bin and another from a dog bowl.

One perpetrator's control extended to deciding when she was allowed to have a cup of tea. When he would make himself a cup of tea, he would pour the remaining hot water out of the kettle to stop her having one. It was reported that one perpetrator 'pulled food out of the fridge' in an act of sabotage.

## Control over clothing and footwear

**"He controlled every aspect of my life from where I went, to what I wore, to what possessions I owned" (2016:5).**

Another theme linked to the acquisition of economic resources was perpetrators preventing victim-survivors from acquiring clothes. In two cases, the perpetrator refused to let the victim-survivor buy clothes.

Rules around the use of clothes were linked to whether they were deemed to be too revealing, with victim-survivors accused of 'flaunting' themselves in front of other men. One woman was not allowed to wear a bikini for this reason. Another was made to wear men's clothes. Appearance and clothing were also linked to derogatory name calling. In one case the perpetrator would make comments about clothes making the woman looking 'fat'.

In some cases, perpetrators refused to let their partner wash their clothes, meaning they would have to wear the same clothes for several days, dictating not only what they were able to wear but also where they could go. In one case the perpetrator flushed his partner's dress down the toilet. In another, the perpetrator dipped his hands into a tin of paint and then covered all the clothes in her wardrobe with it. Bleach was poured on the clothes of a victim-survivor. Cat waste was smeared on the clothing of another.

In other cases, clothing was disposed of. One perpetrator threw away items of clothing belonging to his partner that he did not like. Another damaged his partner's clothing and a third cut his partner's clothing up. Yet another burned his partner's clothes and filmed himself doing so, before sending her the film.

Shoes were also a target of control. In several cases the perpetrator objected to his partner's shoes. In one case, a boyfriend urinated in a woman's shoes. One woman was forced to walk barefoot to the town centre to buy some new shoes, even though it was Sunday evening, and no shops were open. In another case, the perpetrator forced his partner to walk home from a restaurant with no shoes on. In yet another, the perpetrator threatened to abandon his partner in the woods without her shoes. Some victim-survivors were thrown out of their home with no shoes on, with one woman left wandering the streets shoeless and in a torn dress. She met a friend who took her to a shop and bought her a dress to wear. One perpetrator locked his partner in the house and threw her shoes outside.

## Control over makeup and jewellery

News reports recognised that perpetrators controlled every aspect of their partner's lives. This extended to their use of make-up and dictating what jewellery and clothes they were allowed to wear. In some cases, wearing makeup was banned altogether. In others it could only be worn with permission or when the perpetrator dictated it should be. In one case it was sabotaged – smeared with cat faeces and urine. A media report outlined how a perpetrator hid one woman's jewellery and would turn off all the lights, forcing her to have to find it in the dark.

**Table 13: Targets of control identified via the analysis**

Money or other property	Goods and services	Education and employment
Employment and earned income (wages)	Utilities such as heating, water, internet, electricity	Job applications
Other income/money – family income, benefit payments, inheritances and monetary gifts, pension payments	Banking services	Visas, passports, national insurance documents
Mobile phone	Credit services	Uniform or clothing needed for interviews
Pets or other animals	Food	Equipment/machinery at work
Housing, keys, property deeds	Clothing	Education certificates
Furniture – including bathroom furniture (shower, bath, toilet), kitchen appliances (microwave, cooker) and essentials (pots and pans) as well as outdoor appliances (lawnmower)	Health services e.g., dentistry	Materials for study e.g., books
Carpets, doors, windows, walls	Insurance	
Decorative and personal items e.g., photographs, plants, mirrors		
Transportation (cars, car keys, tyres, train/bus pass, car seat)		
Television		
Laptops, tablets etc.		
Necessities such as toiletries including sanitary products		
Personal aids such as glasses, wheelchair		
Bed and mattress		
Sofa		
Make-up and other goods (hairdryer, straighteners)		
Jewellery		
Food		
Children's toys		

## How economic abuse threads through coercive control

As the many examples shared above demonstrate, economic abuse was linked to other forms of coercive control, providing more evidence of how economic abuse threads through and reinforces other tactics (Sharp, 2008). For instance, examples of behaviour described clearly illustrated how destroying belongings was linked to intimidation, coercion, threats, and humiliation (see appendix two).

Similarly, some of the examples highlighted how perpetrators interfered with the ability of children to maintain their own economic resources. Examples are provided of damaged toys and items stolen. In addition, one perpetrator 'drove a six-inch nail through his daughter's phone'. Child benefit was stolen when one perpetrator lost his job. One woman described how she would be refused money to buy items for their child (see appendix two for more examples). Economic control through children also continued post-separation with one victim-survivor describing a 'visceral' phone call, which was played in court, in which the perpetrator taunted her for 'not having the financial resources needed to win a custody battle'.



## Resistance

---

The examples within this report and captured in appendix two capture ways in which victim-survivors attempted to resist the economic control they experienced.

Media reports outlined additional strategies. One victim-survivor hid her bank card and another hid money in her shoe. One woman shared that she'd tell her partner there were 'technical problems' when he tried to transfer her money into his bank account. On the night one victim-survivor decided to leave, she prepared by freezing the joint bank account – an important measure since another media report recounted that the perpetrator had emptied it 'within minutes of leaving'. In a further case the court heard how a woman began to hide food around their home. One victim-survivor bought new phones and SIM cards.

The next chapter explores the economic impact this behaviour had on victim-survivors, and how this was recognised (or not) within the criminal justice system.



# **Chapter six:**

## **The impact of economic abuse and how the courts respond**

## Chapter six: The impact of economic abuse and how the courts respond

Qualitative analysis of the known economic abuse cases reported by the media made clear the economic impact on victim-survivors. This chapter provides an overview of what that looked like and then considers the different ways in which the criminal justice system was reported to respond.

### Impacts of economic abuse

The economic impacts of economic abuse included homelessness, loss of possessions, jobs and prospects and being left in debt with a poor credit score. In one case, a victim-survivor was being forced to share the same house as the perpetrator for financial reasons, meaning that her physical safety also remained at risk.

Victim-survivors described living in poverty, having to ask family for help or reliant on food parcels. One victim-survivor described how she and her children ended up moving in with her parents due to their credit card debts. She also entered an Individual Voluntary Arrangement (IVA) to avoid bankruptcy, and this negatively impacted her credit rating.

More detailed understanding of the impact that economic abuse has on victim-survivors was provided via the in-depth interviews with four women.

One woman was left with nothing when she fled. When she returned to the flat that she had shared with her ex-partner he had taken everything.

**"I had to start again from scratch, with support of the refuge" (Eva).**

Being in £50,000 of coerced debt meant that one woman had to move in with her parents to avoid homelessness. She described how she had to borrow money from them and other family members. Although she was working full-time and earning good money, the cost of paying off the debt meant she was working solely for this purpose and could not do anything for herself, which felt unfair. In many ways she was still trapped.

**"That kind of trapped me at home again because I wasn't able to go out and enjoy life...I've got a really good job, why couldn't I have a life? And that was really frustrating, and really quite upsetting and quite stressful" (Krystal).**

Another of the women interviewed also had a good job but because of the impact of economic abuse on her credit rating was unable to get a mobile phone contract, a car lease, or a mortgage. She'd also had to spend thousands of pounds on dental work due to the injuries her ex-husband had caused as she no longer had access to private health care through work.

**"It's a struggle. So, it's a far reaching and long-standing impact, beyond I think, beyond measure, because it's mental, physical, economic, social, so many different strategies...but he's not [been made to be] responsible for any of it" (Irya).**

The impact of being left in debt was felt by a third woman too after discovering that her ex-husband took out loans and credit cards in her name. He did not pay child maintenance in the period he was arrested and then sentenced because he said he had no money. However, she believed he had money in Panama and Bitcoin.

**"So, he will come out to a financially fine life. Meanwhile, I'm then left to pick up the pieces of the debts that he's accrued in my name...you know, my credit, and my credit report is bottom - rock bottom, I won't be able to get a mortgage, I couldn't take out a loan, but I'm just lucky in that I can afford to pay rent" (Ruth).**

This woman went on to share the economic insecurity she felt if the rent were to be increased, for example, as she had been left with no savings.

## Economic injustice

---

Reflected in the interviews with victim-survivors was a strong sense of injustice. They had been left in an unstable position because of the perpetrator's actions. Moreover, they recognised the ongoing economic threat posed.

**"And you know, I had my first mortgage, when I was 23. I was brought up very, you know, financially soundly and should probably be sitting on a stately mansion by now, the amount I paid over the years. The only asset I have is my pension. And he's already tried to claim off of that" (Ruth).**

**"By dragging out the financial aspect of the divorce over the past 15 months, he has ensured my economic position is constrained and worsened due to the ongoing litigation costs and psychological burden of dealing with frivolous cases and nuisance. He is shamelessly seeking financial aid and settlement from me through the divorce courts to compensate for the legal costs he is choosing to pay to defend himself in these criminal proceedings. At the same time all of this was going on, he sat there through the criminal court through the civil courts, filing case after case, depleting me of my assets and my resources and driving me insane. And he was allowed to do that...he continues to control my economic situation indirectly" (Irya).**

This chimes with the research undertaken by Hester et al. (in press) which identified that, in addition to justice gained via criminal, civil and/or family justice systems, victim-survivors hold notions of justice that go beyond these. Not only do victim-survivors want recognition of economic loss, including housing, job, and credit status but they also require action to be taken to address this, including through reparation.

## Recognising economic abuse within sentencing

---

As chapter one sets out, the Sentencing Council in 2018 added a new aggravating factor of 'victim left in debt, destitute or homeless due to exploitation of finances' within its sentencing guidelines. This is one mechanism through which to explicitly recognise the impact of economic abuse.

Within the qualitative analysis of known economic abuse cases, just two media reports referred to the aggravating factor when reporting on sentencing, despite the number of cases in which the victim-survivor had been left in these circumstances.

In the first case (2021:15) the legal representative for the defendant suggested that there were no aggravating factors, which the judge challenged. Whilst the fact that the victim-survivor was in debt was then recognised, it was argued that the sentencing guidelines 'equate to some extent debt with destitution or homelessness which, of course, this case is not'. The judge decided that related financial issues were ultimately a matter for a family court to decide.

In the second case (2021:41), the judge recognised that the defendant had left the victim in financial debt and that this was an aggravating feature. However, because of the defendant's guilty plea, the sentence was reduced by 25 per cent.

Economic control was referred to by two further media reports within accounts of sentencing considerations more broadly. One judge chose to give a perpetrator a suspended prison sentence, appearing to suggest that it had, at one time, been appropriate that he control his partner's finances.

**"You took control of her finances and that was appropriate because of your ability to handle money - but it became inappropriate" (2019:27).**

In another case economic factors were put forward as an argument against a custodial sentence. The defendant's legal representative stated that he should not be sent to prison because he paid the mortgage of the woman's house and would lose his job if this was the case. As such custody would impact on her. The judge responded that this was 'an extraordinary statement given the catalogue of behaviour'.

**"In my judgement, this is a classic case of controlling and coercive behaviour; your actions were fundamentally designed to undermine, belittle and humiliate the person you profess to love" (2022:98).**

However, because the defendant had no criminal history of domestic abuse, was working and had shown remorse, the judge said he could 'just' suspend the prison sentence he would impose.

In another case the perpetrator appealed his prison sentence, on the basis that the judge had taken too high a starting point and had, therefore, erred in finding that the complainant was 'particularly vulnerable'. It was argued that the complainant was employed, financially independent and benefitted from good social and familial support – yet this was contested by the victim-survivor herself:

**"He basically tried to say to the judge that she's not been economically impacted. She's got a great job, she's won awards, she's still going to continue to make money. She's got a bright future ahead of her. Yet because of this default, I still can't even get a mobile phone contract or work in this country" (Irya).**

The judgement handed down stated that there must be 'something more' present in a victim-survivor's personal circumstances for the threshold of 'particular vulnerability' to be passed for offending behaviour to be placed in the most serious sentencing category. The 'something more' would include, for example, victim-survivors who were particularly young or old, pregnant, or from abroad with no support network.<sup>16</sup>

## Recognising economic abuse through compensation

Again, chapter one set out that the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 (PCCA) can be used to obtain a compensation order to recognise personal injury, loss or damage resulting from an offence, including financial loss suffered as a direct result.

Despite the extensive loss and damage described within the cases analysed, just three per cent (n=14) resulted in compensation being awarded. Moreover, of these, only 2 per cent (n=8) of the cases were clearly linked to economic abuse. Compensation may have been awarded for different reasons within the remaining six cases (indicated by an asterisk – see table 14).

**Table 14 – Summary of compensation awarded within known economic abuse cases**

	Description of economic abuse within reporting of case	Compensation awarded
1.	Smashed victim-survivors' mobile and two televisions (2016:1)	£100
2.	Broke victim-survivors' mobile phone (2017:7)	£500
3.	Controlled the family finances (2017:11)	£800*
4.	Damaged victim-survivors' property (2017:29)	£1,000
5.	Forced victim-survivor to transfer £500 to his bank account via mobile banking (2019:32)	£500
6.	Smashed victim-survivor's mobile phone valued at £130 (2020:41)	£130
7.	Perpetrator caused 'significant damage to her bathroom' and smashed the victim-survivor's mobile phone. It was agreed that a further two counts of criminal damage, which the perpetrator pleaded guilty to, should be dealt with as a civil claim because there were disputes over which item belonged to who (2020:88)	£300
8.	Perpetrator destroyed wife's chandeliers, chairs, and bedroom furniture worth £4,800 (2021:62)	£4,800
9.	No details provided (2022:27)	£500*
10.	No details provided (2022:29)	£1,000*



11.	No details provided (2022:34)	£1,500*
12.	Caused criminal damage; compensation to be paid within 28 days (2022:37)	£200
13.	Refused to let victim-survivor collect her belongings (2022:75)	£2,000*
14.	For domestic abuse. The perpetrator was reported to have 'since agreed to give her a £10,000 share of the house where they lived together.' (2022:83)	£250*

Compensation amounts ranged from £100 to £4,800. In three cases the amount of compensation awarded was known to match the exact costs incurred: a mobile phone worth £130; chandeliers, chairs, and bedroom furniture worth £4,800; and £500 forcibly transferred to the perpetrator's bank account.

Within the known economic abuse sample, a further three news reports stated that compensation was considered, but not awarded.

In another case, the judge assumed the family court would 'resolve the financial affairs of this couple' (2021:15). The victim-survivor had been 'deceived' into selling her own home (it was agreed they would sell their own properties and buy a home together – the perpetrator did not sell his) and giving the perpetrator £40,000 to renovate his flat, subsidise his lifestyle and pay for their wedding.

In a further two cases, the judges opted against compensation to the victim-survivor due to the financial situation of the perpetrator. In one case, this was so as 'not to burden the defendant' due to his 'parlous' financial circumstances (2022:54). The perpetrator had broken the victim-survivors' possessions and demanded £3,500 to buy drugs, causing her to get into debt<sup>17</sup>. In the other case, no compensation order was issued because of the perpetrator's 'lack of means' (2021:43). It is not clear what this referred to.

Finally, it was reported that in one case (2021:58) two car owners were awarded £100 compensation each after the perpetrator punched a wing mirror and smashed a rear windscreen during a physical assault of the victim-survivor. However, nothing was awarded to the victim-survivor herself despite it also being reported that the perpetrator broke her mobile phone.

## Recognising economic abuse through confiscation

Chapter one sets out how the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 may enable assets derived from criminal conduct to be confiscated from the perpetrator, with some of these confiscated assets then used to compensate the victim. This was only mentioned once in relation to a case (2019:78) in which a woman was convicted after forcing her ex-partner to sell his home and her new partner was found guilty of intentionally encouraging or assisting the commission of an offence. The judge who sentenced the couple postponed a proceeds of crime investigation.

Based on this analysis, it appears that, despite available powers, the criminal justice system is not doing all it can to facilitate economic justice for victim-survivors. At the same time, existing powers do not capture all the harms arising from economic abuse, such as a poor credit score.



# **Chapter seven: Conclusions and recommendations**



## Chapter seven: Conclusions and recommendations

This report has presented research findings from analysing 810 successfully prosecuted cases of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence.

The prevalence of economic abuse within this sample is broadly consistent with research into successfully prosecuted cases which SEA undertook in 2017, indicating that, as a form of coercive control, economic abuse is 'in plain sight'. However, the substantially larger sample size analysed in this study means that not only has it been possible to further explore how economic abuse is reflected within these cases, but to begin to understand the impact it has and how this form of control is responded to by the criminal justice system.

The findings are discussed below, organised by the Home Office's logic model introduced in chapter two, with specific reference to prosecuting economic control.

### Aim of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence

---

The Home Office review (2021) concludes that the fact that the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence has been used across the criminal justice system since it was brought into force indicates that the legislation has provided an improved legal framework to tackle the issue. But has it provided an improved legal framework within which to tackle economic abuse?

As noted in chapter two, the offence is not totally unprecedented in criminalising economic control as a form of 'non-physical' abuse. Moreover, the findings of the research show that offences penalising economic abuse were prosecuted alongside the offence, including criminal damage/property damage, theft, and fraud which were all more commonly charged alongside the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence in the known economic abuse cases compared to those reports which did not describe economic abuse.

Yet what the offence does do is incorporate women's experiential definitions of abuse into criminal law for the first time. This means that many of the victim-survivor experiences of economic control outlined in chapter five would previously have gone undocumented and unpunished. Perpetrators used a host of tactics to interfere with the ability of victim-survivors to acquire, use and maintain economic resources. The tactics used fell under the constructs of economic restriction, exploitation, and sabotage.

On this basis it could be argued that the question linked to economic abuse within the new Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA) is too narrow in scope, focusing only on finances and their restriction, to the exclusion of economic resources more broadly and tactics of exploitation and sabotage. **Police guidance on the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence will need to ensure that responding officers are aware of the many different forms that economic abuse takes.**

### Awareness of Controlling or Coercive Behaviour

---

The Home Office (2021) review expected the offence to increase awareness and understanding of controlling or coercive behaviour, both across the criminal justice system and among the public.

The 2017 **Into Plain Sight** analysis found that just one media report named financial abuse. This analysis found that more media reports explicitly recognised and named the behaviours described as financial or economic control or abuse, but this was not widespread. Furthermore, the reports continued to link forms of economic control with restriction and dependency which not all victim-survivors will relate to.

In the Home Office 2021 review, domestic abuse charities (including SEA) suggested that victims did not initially recognise what was happening to them as a form of abuse or felt that the police would not take it seriously. This was particularly flagged in cases of economic abuse. Certainly, the findings suggest that victim-survivors were not in touch with the police because of economic abuse (see below). The interviews with victim-survivors undertaken within the research also found that they did not recognise their own experiences as coercive control or economic abuse.

These findings reinforce the 2017 recommendation that **awareness-raising activity needs to be undertaken so that behaviours which seek to interfere with an individual's ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources are understood as abusive**. Additional themes within the analysis of economic abuse cases which could indicate early warning signs of coercive control alongside different forms of economic control included: jealousy, isolation, name-calling, and others forms of degradation such as spitting at a victim-survivor. Similarly particular life events such as pregnancy increase risk. These warning signs need to be recognised more widely to support early intervention.

Across both intimate partner and adult family violence cases, where it was known, the perpetrators were nearly all male and the victim-survivors were nearly all female. That one perpetrator was a trans man, and one victim-survivor shared her story to highlight help and support available for domestic abuse victims in the LGBTQ+ community indicates a **need for increased understanding of the experience of economic abuse when it is not perpetrated by a heterosexual male against a female. Similarly, more research needs to be undertaken into the experience of males experiencing economic abuse.**

The youngest perpetrator was 16 and the oldest was 81, highlighting the need to **raise awareness of coercive control from a young age, as well as the need to consider coercive control for older women, including when their partner has taken on a caring role.**

Because the mean age of the victim-survivor when looking at just the adult family violence cases in the overall sample was 58 (compared to 30 in the intimate partner cases) and the median age was 70 (compared to 27 in the intimate partner cases) these findings also reinforce the **importance of understanding how the dynamics of adult family violence differ.**

Whilst demographics were not consistently reported beyond sex and age, descriptions of abuse indicated both how personalised the tactics of coercive control are to a victim-survivor as well as the 'continuities and difference' in experiences of coercive control (Singh, 2020). **A particularly strong theme within the economic abuse cases was disability which also needs to be understood in more detail, along with factors such as religion, race, and socio-economic status.**

**In addition, more research needs to be undertaken to explore the dynamics of economic abuse within so-called 'honour' based violence and forced marriages, including the supporting roles played by family members in intimate partner violence.**

## Police recorded incidents

---

The Home Office expected that the introduction of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence and raising awareness of it would lead to it being recognised, reported to, and recorded by the police. This study suggests that there has not been increased public understanding of the 'non-physical forms' of abuse – including economic abuse – leading to reports to the police. Barwick et al., (2020) note that victim-survivors frequently do not initially report emotional or economic abuse to the police, rather they report an 'emergency' that requires immediate police intervention. The findings of this study echo this observation.

Just over half of the successfully prosecuted cases were linked to a physical assault and the known economic abuse cases appeared to be more likely to involve stalking. Moreover, nearly one in ten cases were prosecuted alongside charges linked to threatening behaviour/fear/serious distress/threats to a life. In one of the known economic abuse cases the perpetrator was found guilty of manslaughter, whilst in another case, the inquest found the victim was unlawfully killed after her death by suicide – creating a context of such control that the victim-survivor felt they had no choice but to take their own life. Consistent with research that the experience of economic abuse is positively correlated with suicide (Aitken & Munro, 2018), a further six per cent of victims-survivors shared that they had either considered or tried taking their own life.

The new statutory guidance framework for Controlling or Coercive Behaviour which names and defines economic abuse was only published by the Home Office in April 2023, as was the updated CPS legal guidance on the offence. In addition, and as noted above, specific police guidance on the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence is yet to be published. **This reinforces the importance of police training to**

**establish whether there are patterns of controlling or coercive behaviours underlying the incident that led to a police callout as well the ability to proactively recognise and identify the signs of coercive control, including economic control when a victim-survivor is making a statement and may be alluding to these behaviours within their description of the circumstances.** Investigation templates and effective supervision are also important.

## **Evidencing controlling or coercive behaviour including economic abuse**

Prosecutors and academics within the 2021 Home Office review noted that there had been cases of effective prosecutions based on good evidence for controlling or coercive behaviour, including evidence from third parties such as banks to show economic abuse.

The findings indicate that **skills related to evidencing economic abuse need to be further developed by the police.** Cases appeared to rely on witness statements made by the victim-survivor or someone else with relevant knowledge. The in-depth interviews with women undertaken by SEA suggested that, in some cases, police officers may dismiss other evidence linked to economic abuse.

Bettinson (2020) states that prosecuting cases of controlling or coercive behaviour without the victim's support are 'impossible'. However, the precedent set in one case of a successful prosecution using hearsay evidence is promising.

The 'serious adverse effect' threshold which, according to Bettinson (2020) also makes prosecuting without the victim's support impossible, was not a theme identified within the research. This is likely to be because the known economic abuse case sample analysed was made up of successfully prosecuted cases only and featured a high number of guilty pleas. **Future research therefore needs to look at unsuccessful prosecutions and compare these to prosecutions in Scotland** where prosecutions do not require the police and prosecutors to demonstrate the harm that the victim has experienced, instead placing the focus of the prosecution on the behaviours and state of mind of the defendant.

Furthermore, given the use of banking products and systems within the tactics used by perpetrators to interfere with a victim-survivor's ability to use, acquire and maintain economic resources, **the government should consider what role the financial services sector could play in supporting criminal prosecutions of controlling or coercive behaviour.** The Home Office evaluation noted how successful prosecutions of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence have been secured based on good evidence from third parties, including banks. Moreover, in its statutory guidance framework on controlling or coercive behaviour, the Home Office recognises financial services (including banks and building societies) as a key stakeholder in responding to economic abuse. Specific reference is made to the UK Finance 2021 Financial Abuse Code (see chapter two) which has created a step-change in how customers are responded to, creating more consistency in the support available for those who need it.

Since the misuse of financial products and services in this way is already criminalised within the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence, SEA also agrees with Garner and Kelly (2023) that there is need for government to explore with the financial services sector how, in their words, we can 'shift the dial' **to hold the perpetrator accountable for their actions.**

## **Prosecuting controlling or coercive behaviour**

The research findings reveal that seven years after implementation, all police forces have now put forward a prosecution for the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence. Some forces have seemingly put forward more cases for prosecution than others. **Such variation could reflect the need for more police training on identifying coercive control, investigation, and documentation in some forces,** although variation in relation to local media reporting may also account for this.



Statistics set out in chapter two show that only a fraction of police reported cases are taken forward to charge and then prosecution. This analysis indicates that perhaps only the strongest cases are progressed. Nearly nine in ten cases were heard in a Crown Court alongside other charges. Moreover, nearly three-quarters (73%) of the defendants plead guilty to the charge of controlling or coercive behaviour. This percentage was slightly higher within the sub-sample of economic abuse cases, in which nearly eight in ten defendants (78%) plead guilty.<sup>18</sup>

Less than a third of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence cases containing at least one form of economic abuse were prosecuted as a standalone crime. Unsurprisingly, offences linked to economic abuse such as criminal damage/property damage, theft, and fraud were more commonly charged alongside the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence in these cases. **There is a need to better understand what criminal/property damage relates to** as few media reports shared this detail.

These findings also lend weight to the argument that coercive control has become 'the offence' rather than the overriding framework.<sup>19</sup> Very few cases were prosecuted with the understanding that physical assault can be 'encompassed' within a single charge as is routinely the case in Scotland. The in-depth interviews with victim-survivors undertaken by SEA indicated that the dropping of additional charges also led to a sense of injustice. **Research into the operation of similar offences across Scotland and Northern Ireland that can be compared to the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence in England and Wales would be valuable.**

## Custodial sentences

---

Another intended outcome of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence was an increase in the severity and effectiveness of punishment for domestic abuse offenders, with a greater number of domestic abuse offenders brought to justice.

When the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence was introduced, the recording rules set out that unless any associated physical assault was more serious, amounting to at least an offence of grievous bodily harm, it should be recorded as the principal offence. This was to avoid a lesser potential custodial sentence length of the maximum sentence of five years.<sup>20</sup> For Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offences in which at least one form of economic abuse was identified, the mean prison length was nearly two years (23.5 months). Whilst the average prison length for economic abuse cases where more than one offence was being prosecuted was nearly twice that at nearly four years (45 months) it still fell short of the five years maximum sentence.

Whilst sentencing guidelines in 2018 introduced a new aggravating factor of 'victim left in debt, destitute or homeless due to exploitation of finances' just two media reports referred to this aggravating factor, despite these being themes arising in the analysis. In addition, an argument was made in one case that the sentencing guidelines 'equate to some extent debt with destitution or homelessness'. This suggests that **more needs to be done to make the Crown Prosecution Service and the judiciary aware of the aggravating factor and that more detailed guidance should be developed to help interpret what this means in practice.**

Similarly, in the same way as resilience could be penalised in assessing 'adverse impact' so it also appears to be reflected in assessing 'particular vulnerability' when it comes to sentencing. This needs to be looked at again. In cases where it was known, defendants in known economic abuse cases were slightly more likely to receive a suspended sentence. Thus, despite the findings suggesting that these cases might cause more harm, it may be the case that they are somehow perceived as less serious. As SEA recommended in 2017, it is vital that **responses to domestic violence cases should incorporate an understanding of both physical and economic safety.**

Connected to this point, **situations in which separated couples are forced to live together due to financial pressures must also be addressed** as such scenarios are unsafe, particularly during criminal proceedings.

## Improved outcomes for victim-survivors

---

In the short term, improved outcomes for victim-survivors of controlling or coercive behaviour were anticipated within the Home Office's logic model.

Linked to court outcomes is the issue of economic justice for victim-survivors of economic abuse. The extensive descriptions of experiences of economic control very clearly demonstrate the wide range of economic resources that become targets of control and the impacts that this form of control has on victim-survivors. Impacts include homelessness, loss of possessions, jobs and prospects and being left in debt with a poor credit score. Women also referred to being made to take on tasks, responsibilities, and roles which, despite being economic activity, are not constructed in the same way as paid work. This is consistent with the importance Anitha (2019) places on the performance of their traditional gender roles.

Yet the thematic analysis of how economic abuse is responded to within the criminal justice system indicates that there was very little recognition of what could be done to recognise these impacts. Not only do victim-survivors want criminal justice to be done, but they also want economic justice through action to address the costs arising from economic abuse, including through reparation. Despite the loss and damage described within the known economic abuse cases analysed, just two per cent resulted in compensation orders. Similarly, the qualitative analysis uncovered only one mention of the Proceeds of Crime Act. **It is recommended that compensation as well as the confiscation of assets derived from criminal conduct should be routinely considered in sentencing for the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence.** In these circumstances, there ought to be a full disclosure of any assets held by the perpetrator. Moreover, **perpetrators should not be allowed to bring civil proceedings against a partner when criminal proceedings are ongoing.**

It represents a further injustice to victim-survivors of economic abuse that, in two cases, the judges opted against compensation to the victim-survivor due to the poor financial situation of the perpetrator. Since research has shown that perpetrators are more likely to use exploitation when victim-survivors are more advantaged than they are in terms of assets or credit (Adams et al. 2023) this is likely to be a recurring issue. SEA suggests that, in cases where compensation will be limited by the offender's own resources and may not be given (even where loss is established) then **compensation should be paid to the victim-survivor by the government (perhaps from the victim surcharge) with attempts then made to pursue the perpetrator for reimbursement when their financial circumstances allow.**

There appeared to be an assumption made by the courts that the financial affairs of victim-survivors of economic abuse will be resolved in the family courts following criminal proceedings which is not necessarily the case. Whilst good practice (when safe) to vary a restraining order to provide for mechanisms through which joint property, for example, can be dealt with, **it is recommended that the courts consider and take all possible measures to provide reparation for victim-survivors financially impacted by economic abuse using mechanisms within the criminal justice system itself.**

At the same time, existing powers do not capture all the harms arising from economic abuse, such as a poor credit score. **SEA is, therefore, also calling on the government to work with credit reference agencies to explore the potential of international practice such as Canadian Restitution Orders** which not only require the offender to pay the victim-survivor for the financial losses they suffered because of the offender's crime, but to also restore a victim-survivor's credit history or rating to reflect their creditworthiness and not the abuse they experienced.

Stark and Hester (2019) suggested that the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence could help to improve partnership working between the criminal justice system, the community and the third sector and strengthen the support they are able to offer victims. However, as the recommendation above highlights, the offence could also help to improve partnership working with the financial services sector to ensure better outcomes for victim-survivors. Similarly, the extensive findings linked to perpetrator interference with victim-survivors' employment also highlights the **potential of improving partnership working with bodies working with employers.**

## Deterring offenders

---

In the longer term, the Home Office anticipated that the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence would lead to a reduction in the prevalence of domestic abuse, through better recognition of these behaviours; and by the punishment of Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offences, providing a deterrent to would-be perpetrators and preventing re-offending.

Applying criminal sanctions to specific forms of non-physical abuse has been suggested as another deterrent to those who use it, with the state of Tasmania in Australia cited as having created a specific criminal offence of economic abuse. To this end, SEA reiterates the 2017 **Into Plain Sight** recommendation that the **Westminster Government should explore the pros and cons of making economic abuse a criminal offence.**

## Conclusion

---

As this analysis of successful prosecutions of the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Offence has shown, much more can and should be done to ensure that economic abuse is better reflected and responded to by the criminal justice system. It is vital that such cases are prosecuted earlier and do not escalate to the levels described within the study which too often result in homicide and suicide.

# Appendices

## Appendix one: Quantitative analysis of successfully prosecuted controlling or coercive behaviour cases

Sub sample filtered by	CCB	CCB with EA	CCB without EA	CCB with EA and IPV	CCB with EA and AFV	CCB without EA, and IPV	CCB without EA, and AFV
With EA?		Yes		Yes	Yes		
Without EA?			Yes			Yes	Yes
By IPV?				Yes		Yes	
By AFV?					Yes		Yes
Sample Size	810	517	293	462	32	224	3
Sex of abuser (male)	98%	98%	98%	99%	91%	99%	100%
Sex of victim (female or mix) *	98%	97%	99%	99%	78%	99%	100%
Median age of abuser	32	32	31	32	33	31	44
Median age of victim	27	27	27	26	71	27	34
Repeat offenders (including missing data)	37%	40%	32%	42%	28%	37%	33%
Repeat offenders (excluding missing data)	93%	93%	94%	93%	82%	93%	100%
CCB stand-alone offence	31%	31%	30%	31%	38%	32%	0%
Cases where there were additional charges of violence (e.g. ABH, GBH, section 20 assault etc)	52%	52%	51%	53%	47%	52%	67%
Cases with an additional charge of sexual assault and rape	7.7%	11.6%	5.4%	4.5%	0%	7.1%	0%
Cases with an additional charge criminal damage / property damage	10.1%	13.5%	4.1%	14.3%	9.4%	4.5%	0%
Cases resulting in a restraining order	50%	54%	44%	54%	56%	49%	33%
Mean duration of restraining order	6.5 year	6.5 years	6.9 years	6.4 years	3.4 years	6.8 years	5.0 years
Cases resulting in a custodial sentence	75%	74%	76%	75%	66%	79%	100%
Mean duration of custodial sentence	47 months	45 months	52 months	44 months	24 months	45 months	19 months
Cases resulting in a suspended sentence	15%	18%	9%	19%	13%	11%	0%
Plea (excluding missing data)	79%	82%	73%	83%	87%	75%	100%

\*where data was available

## Appendix two: How economic abuse threads through other forms of coercive control

### Intimidation

"[He] placed conditions on gifts in order to ascertain further control" (2018:43).

"On the same day the woman realised her bank card had been taken, [he] later messaged her telling her to 'prepare for the madness'" (2019:3).

"If she didn't hand over any cash, [he] would threaten to smash up the house" (2019:10).

"She was threatened with violence towards her and her property if she did not comply to his demands" (2019:79).

"There were the demands he made for money and the indications he would smash items if not given that money" (2020:76).

"He told her she did not deserve the presents he bought her and so cut up £500 in notes as well as some of her clothing, throwing them into the yard" (2021:1).

"Even from prison while awaiting sentence [he] was able to send her a card and flowers, in what the victim believed was a way of controlling her" (2022:15).

"He would buy her presents and then threaten to take them off her if she said she was leaving him" (2022:23).

### Physical abuse

"He was shouting at her and demanded money. He was poking her in the face and punched her in the leg" (2018:41).

"He headbutted her while demanding money and stole her iPad and Fitbit" (2019:7).

"[He] repeatedly threw her to the floor while trying to take her phone" (2019:13).

"[He] first assaulted the woman when he hit her across both cheeks during a row over money. During another attack, he hit her over the head with an internet router during an argument over who paid for the internet" (2019:90).

"[When she] returned from a trip, her husband 'got in her face, was shouting about wasting money going to [place] and was poking her in the face" (2021:15).

"He kicked his ex in the head and smashed a mirror over her as he accused her of cheating" (2021:22).

"After one row about money he flung round a pair of jeans, with the belt attached, striking her with the buckle" (2021:84).

"He then argued with her about the car she helped him buy and demanded that she gave him money throwing a punch at her and then kicking her to her upper right arm" (2021:99).



## Sexual abuse

"[The] convicted rapist forced [his] girlfriend to work at city lap dancing bar" (2017:2).

"[He] kept [her] as his sex slave and advertised her for group sex after meeting her online and forcing her to come to the UK by threatening to show intimate photos of her" (2017:16).

"He flushed her contraceptive pill down the toilet" (2019:68).

"He demanded money and when she would not pay him, he told her he was going to send a gang of men to gang rape her" (2020:8).

"[He] slapped [name] the day before she gave birth as well as ripping up her baby scan and making her sleep without a blanket if she refused to have sex with him" (2020:68).

"The woman became a sex worker when [he] commanded she raise money to fund his drug addiction" (2021:91).

"During one ordeal, she was made to strip as [he] believed she had money on her and was hiding it" (2021:97).

"[Her] husband arranged for the complainant to have sex with men in exchange for cash or drugs" (2022:110).

## Using emotional abuse

"[He said she was] useless and couldn't work" (2019:11).

"As she tried to end the relationship with you, you persuaded her to stay with you by being over affectionate and threatening to kill yourself and showering her with gifts" (2019:43).

"[He] was not even unknown to have mocked the way [name] drove their car" (2020:15).

## Using isolation

"He also sold her mobile phone, which enabled him to control whom she spoke to" (2018:4).

"[He] damaged her phone to stop her contacting other people" (2018:28).

"[He] later took her to get a new one [mobile phone] but made her sign into his Google account so he could keep an eye on any messages she sent" (2018:10).

"[He] said his wife would give him most of the money she earned working at Tesco and he discouraged her from learning to drive, choosing instead to drive her to and from work" (2019:23).

"He also got her to surrender her phone to him, which he used to send cruel messages to her mum, as if from her, driving a wedge between them" (2020:16).

"He would hide the victim's glasses so she couldn't leave the flat" (2020:53).

"He would go on Facebook and ask her friends for money" (2020:76).

"He withheld her phone, deleting contacts stored on it" (2020:82).

"He would often take her phone from her to check messages" (2021:2).

"The 22-year-old let her car tyres down to prevent her going out with friends" (2021:46).

"He asked his victim to stay at their home, but she told him that she was going out with friends which resulted in [him] punching doors at the property" (2021:57).

"He would often turn off the wi-fi so she had no connection with the outside world" (2021:82).

"She was also only permitted to talk to her own daughter on the phone for five minutes on an evening, and if she went over that limit, he would 'get moody'" (2021:63).

### **Using male privilege**

"The couple had a further argument when [name] wanted dinner to be served leading to a row over food bills" (2020:23).

"He said he worked in [country] to pay the £5,000 a month mortgage and claimed his family did not welcome him home, nor give him a hug or respect him" (2021:73).

"The woman couldn't sit on somebody else's sofa without being subservient to you and asking your permission to do so. She couldn't have a drink without asking your permission first" (2021:82).

"But he soon returned to type, "flipping" after another row about money claiming the world was run by women" (2021:84).

"He then started complaining that she was 'failing to support him financially as she should'" (2021:89).

"Jurors heard [he] berated his wife's cooking, child-rearing, and spending" (2021:109).

"He would lose his temper if dinner wasn't ready or if there was no money in the bank" (2022: 100).

# References

- Adams, A., Sullivan, C., Bybee, D., & Greeson, M. (2008).** Development of the scale of economic abuse. *Violence Against Women*, 14(5), 563–587. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801208315529>
- Adams, A., Greeson, M., Littwin, A., & Javorka, M. (2019).** The revised Scale of Economic Abuse (SEA2): Development and initial psychometric testing of an updated measure of economic abuse in intimate relationships. *Psychology of Violence*, 10(3), 268–278. <https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000244>
- Adams, A. & Beeble, M., Biswas, A., Flynn, R. & Vollinger, L. (2023).** An Exploratory Study of Financial Health as an Antecedent of Economic Abuse Among Women Seeking Help for Intimate Partner Violence. *Violence against women*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012231170867>
- Aitken, R., & Munro, V. (2018).** Domestic abuse and suicide – Exploring the links with Refuge's client base and work force. London: Refuge.
- Anitha, S. (2019).** Understanding economic abuse through an intersectional lens: Financial abuse, control, and exploitation of women's productive and reproductive labor. *Violence Against Women*, 25(15), 1854–1877. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801218824050>
- Barlow, C., Johnson, K., Walklate, S. and Humphreys, L. (2019).** Putting Coercive Control into Practice: problems and possibilities. *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 60 (1), pp 160–17. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azz041>
- Barwick, K., McGorrery, P. and McMahon, M., (2020).** Ahead of Their Time? The Offences of Economic and Emotional Abuse in Tasmania, Australia. In: McMahon, M., McGorrery, P. (eds) *Criminalising Coercive Control*. Springer, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6_1)
- Bettinson, V. (2020).** A Comparative Evaluation of Offences: Criminalising Abusive Behaviour in England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and Tasmania. In: McMahon, M., McGorrery, P. (eds) *Criminalising Coercive Control*. Springer, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6_1)
- Brennan, I., Burton, V., Gormally, S. and O'Leary, N. (2018).** Service provider difficulties in operationalising coercive control. *Violence Against Women*, vol. 25 (6), pp 635–653. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801218797478>
- DAIP. (1984).** Domestic abuse intervention programs. The power and control wheel (The Duluth model). Retrieved from <http://www.theduluthmodel.org/training/wheels.html>
- Dutton, M. A., & Goodman, L. A. (2005).** Coercion in intimate partner violence: Toward a new conceptualization. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 52(11–12), 743–756. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-005-4196-6>
- Garner, M. and Kelly, L. (2022).** Shifting the dial: Increasing understanding of and improving responses to the perpetration of economic abuse. London: London Metropolitan University.
- Hester, M. (in press)** What is justice? – perspectives of victims-survivors of gender-based violence. *Violence Against Women*.
- Hogan-Lovells with Surviving Economic Abuse. (2022).** Legal rights and remedies for economic abuse. London: Surviving Economic Abuse.

**Home Office. (2005).** Domestic violence: A national report. London: Home Office.

**House of Commons. (2008).** Domestic violence, forced marriage and "honour"-based violence: Further government response to the committee's sixth report of session 2007–2008. Home Affairs Committee.

**Home Office. (2016).** Domestic Homicide Reviews: Key findings from analysis of domestic homicide reviews. London: Home Office.

**Home Office. (2021).** Review of the controlling or coercive behaviour offence. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-the-controlling-or-coercive-behaviour-offence>. London: Home Office.

**Home Office/AVA. (2013).** Information in local areas on the change to the definition of domestic violence and abuse. London: Home Office.

**HM Government. (2019).** Transforming the response to domestic abuse: consultation response and draft bill. London: Home Office.  
Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-consultation-response-and-draft-bill>.

**Jewkes, Y. (2011).** Media & Crime. London: SAGE.

**Kelly, L. (1988).** Surviving Sexual Violence. Cambridge: Polity Press.

**Kelly, L., Sharp, N., & Klein, R. (2014).** Finding the Costs of Freedom: How women and children rebuild their lives after domestic violence. London: Solace Women's Aid and Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit.

**Kelly, L., & Westmarland, N. (2014, April).** Time for a rethink – Why the current government definition of domestic violence is a problem. Trouble and Strife. Retrieved from [Time for a rethink – why the current government definition of domestic violence is a problem. – Trouble and Strife](#)

**Kelly, L. & Westmarland, N. (2016).** Naming and defining 'domestic violence': Lessons from research with violent men. Feminist Review, 112(1), 113-127. <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2015.52>

**Littwin, A. (2012).** Coerced Debt: The Role of Consumer Credit in Domestic Violence. California Law Review, 100(4), 951-1026. <https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38VR6G>

**McMahon, M. and McGorrery, P. (2019).** Criminalising "the Worst" Part: Operationalising the Offence of Coercive Control in England and Wales. The Criminal Law Review, vol.11, pp 957–965.

**McMahon, M., & McGorrery, P. (2020).** Criminalising Coercive Control: An Introduction. In: McMahon, M., McGorrery, P. (eds) Criminalising Coercive Control. Springer, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6_1)

**McMahon, M., McGorrery, P. & Burton, K. (2020).** An Alternative Means of Prosecuting Non-Physical Domestic Abuse: Are Stalking Laws An Under-Utilised Resource? In: McMahon, M., McGorrery, P. (eds) Criminalising Coercive Control. Springer, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6_1)

**Merry, A. (2023).** Insurance and economic abuse: The challenges faced by victim-survivors of economic abuse in accessing insurance protection. London: Surviving Economic Abuse.

**Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 25 November 2022**, ONS website, article, [Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales: November 2022](#)

**Orr, S. (2020).** Economic abuse. In Whole Housing Approach (WHA) Toolkit. London: Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance.

**Pence, E., & Paymar, M. (1986).** Power and control: Tactics of men who batter. Duluth, MN: Minnesota Program Development Inc.

**Portas, J., and Sharp-Jeffs, N. (2021).** The Economic Abuse Threat Facing Girls & Women in the UK: 6 Moments that Matter in the Lives of Female Survivors. A Person-Led Approach for the Financial Services Sector in Empowering and Supporting Customers and Employees. London: 6 Moments That Matter and Surviving Economic Abuse, Copyright © 2021, Available from: <https://www.6momentsthatmatter.com/published-material>

**Postmus, J. L., Plummer, S.-B., & Stylianou, A. M. (2016).** Measuring economic abuse in the lives of survivors: Revising the scale of economic abuse. *Violence Against Women*, 22(6), 692–703. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215610012>

**Robinson, A.L., Myhill, A., Wire, J., Roberts, J. and Tilley, N. (2016).** Risk-led policing of domestic abuse and the DASH risk model. College of Policing.

**Royal, K. (2022).** Economic abuse: A global perspective. London: Surviving Economic Abuse.

**Scott, M. (2020).** The Making of the New 'Gold Standard': The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018. In: McMahon, M., McGorrery, P. (eds) *Criminalising Coercive Control*. Springer, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6_1)

**Sharp, N. (2008).** What's yours is mine – The impact of economic abuse on women and children experiencing domestic violence. London: Refuge.

**Sharp-Jeffs, N. (2015).** Money matters: Research into the extent and nature of financial abuse within intimate relationships in the UK. London: The Co-operative Bank/Refuge.

**Sharp-Jeffs, N. with Learmonth, S. (2017).** Into Plain Sight: How economic abuse is reflected in successful prosecutions of controlling or coercive behaviour. London: Surviving Economic Abuse.

**Sharp-Jeffs, N. (2021).** Understanding the economics of abuse: an assessment of the economic abuse definition within the Domestic Abuse Bill. *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*

**Sharp-Jeffs, N. (2022).** Understanding and Responding to Economic Abuse. *Feminist Developments in Violence and Abuse*. Emerald Publishing, UK.

**Singh, S. (2022).** Domestic Economic Abuse: The violence of money. New York: Routledge Focus. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003178606>

**Stanley, N., Chantler, K., & Robbins, R. (2019).** Children and domestic homicide. *British Journal of Social Work*, 49(1), 59–76. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcy024>

**Stark, E. (2007).** Coercive control: How men entrap women in personal life. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Stark, E. (2012).** Coercive control. In N. Lombard & L. McMillan (Eds.) *Violence against women: Current theory and practice in domestic abuse*. London: Jessica Kingsley.



**Stark, E. (2020).** 'The Coercive Control Framework': Making Law Work for Women. In: McMahon, M., McGorrery, P. (eds) Criminalising Coercive Control. Springer, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6_1)

**Stark, E. and Hester M. (2019).** Coercive Control: Update and Review. Violence against Women, vol. 25 (1), pp 81–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801218816191>

**Tuerkheimer, D. (2013).** Breakups. Yale Journal of Law and Feminism, 25, 51–100.

**UK Finance (2021)** 2021 Financial Abuse Code. London: UK Finance.

**Wade, C. (2023).** Domestic Homicide Sentencing Review. Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1143045/domestic-homicide-sentencing-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1143045/domestic-homicide-sentencing-review.pdf)

**Walby, S. & Allen, J. (2004).** Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey, London: Home Office Research Study 276.

**Walklate, S., Fitz-Gibbon, K. and McCulloch J. (2018).** Is more law the answer? Seeking justice for victims of intimate partner violence through the reform of legal categories. Criminology & Criminal Justice, vol. 18 (1), pp 115–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895817728561>

**Websdale, N. (1999).** Understanding Domestic Homicide, California: Northeastern University Press.

**Westmarland, N. (2015).** Violence against women: Criminological perspectives on men's violences. New York, NY: Routledge.

**Wiener, C. (2017).** Seeing What is "Invisible in Plain Sight": Policing Coercive Control. The Howard Journal, vol. 56 (4), pp 500–515. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hojo.12227>

**Wiener, C. (2020).** From Social Construct to Legal Innovation: The Offence of Coercive or Controlling Behaviour in England and Wales. In: McMahon, M., McGorrery, P. (eds) Criminalising Coercive Control. Springer, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0653-6_1)

**Wire, J., & Myhill, A. (2018).** Piloting a new approach to domestic abuse frontline risk assessment [Evaluation]. London, UK: College of Policing

---

<sup>1</sup> Include reference to economic abuse in the statutory guidance for the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour and in the statutory guidance for future Stalking Protection Orders and DAPOs; Update legal guidance for prosecutors to ensure cases of economic abuse can be successfully prosecuted; Continue to work with UK Finance to encourage banks and financial authorities to do more to support victims of domestic abuse; Provide £200,000 to the National Skills Academy for Financial Services to develop and deliver financial capability training for front-line workers; Provide funding to update the Domestic Abuse Matters police change programme so that it includes economic abuse. Home Office; Provide approximately £250,000 of funding to create a national advice service for banks and building societies, increase the capacity of existing telephone casework services for victims of domestic abuse and develop resources to help people identify if they are experiencing economic abuse; Work closely with the Scottish Government to establish the practicalities of delivering split payments in Universal Credit in Scotland: Domestic abuse consultation response and draft bill - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))

<sup>2</sup> Adams et al. 2019 add 'reversing the direction of dependence' to this description; however, perpetrators using this tactic also simultaneously maintain and grow their own economic resources (Sharp-Jeffs, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> 2022/23 statistic shared with SEA by the CPS in email correspondence.

<sup>4</sup> The Home Office notes that some academics and stakeholders argue that the maximum sentence length for CCB should be increased from five to ten years (Home Office, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> 'Controlling' Hartlepool dad cleared of coercion charge - because his victim coped too well | Hartlepool Mail

<sup>6</sup> The Home Office notes that some academics and stakeholders argue that the maximum sentence length for CCB should be increased from five to ten years (Home Office, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> For example, including non-action such as non-payment of a joint mortgage, is likely to be missed when looked at through a stalking and harassment prism

<sup>8</sup> Note that 2019:93 sits outside the EA case sample

<sup>9</sup> Note that the quotes from the women interviewed are shared against shaded backgrounds.

<sup>10</sup> Whilst there were many parallels with adult family violence and, in some cases the perpetrator controlled both intimate partners and family members (for example, 2019:1)

<sup>11</sup> It was not possible to identify a government source for the total number of prosecuted cases in 2022. However, of all the cases prosecuted between 2016 and 2021 (n=1,764) SEA was able to identify details for 35 per cent (n=610) that resulted in conviction, representing just over a third.

<sup>12</sup> The trans man was a perpetrator within the intimate partner violence cases

<sup>13</sup> Compared to only 65 per cent of guilty pleas in the sample of non-economic abuse cases.

<sup>14</sup> The programme used by the probation service.

<sup>15</sup> (50, 17, 14,500, 4, 70,000, 10,000, 5,000, 3,500)

<sup>16</sup> Court of Appeal - Controlling and Coercive Behaviour ([corkerbinning.com](https://corkerbinning.com))

<sup>17</sup> The full report will explore the issue of victim-survivors being left in debt (including up to £50,000)

<sup>18</sup> Compared to only 65 per cent of guilty pleas in the sample of non-economic abuse cases.

<sup>19</sup> Kelly and Westmarland (2016)

<sup>20</sup> The Home Office notes that some academics and stakeholders argue that the maximum sentence length for CCB should be increased from five to ten years (Home Office, 2021).

**Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) is the only UK charity dedicated to raising awareness of economic abuse and transforming responses to it. The charity works day in, day out to ensure that women are supported not only to survive, but also to thrive.**

## **Get involved**

If you would like to get involved in our work:

Contact us:

**[info@survivingeconomicabuse.org](mailto:info@survivingeconomicabuse.org)**

Follow us on Twitter:

**@SEAsource**

Learn more about economic abuse and access useful resources at:

**[www.survivingeconomicabuse.org](http://www.survivingeconomicabuse.org)**

Join our 'Experts by Experience' Group:

**[www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/survivors-ref-group](http://www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/survivors-ref-group)**

Join our international network:

**[www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/home/international-network](http://www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/home/international-network)**

Raise funds or donate to us:

**[www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/donate-to-us](http://www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/donate-to-us)**

**Registered charity number 1173256**