

funded by:



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada



CANADIAN CENTER
FOR WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT

CENTRE CANADIEN
POUR L'AUTONOMISATION
DES FEMMES

To:

FEWO - Standing Committee on the Status of Women

House of Commons

Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

From:

Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment (CCFWE)

Ottawa (ON), K1N 9N5

info@ccfwe.org

www.ccfwe.org

Ottawa, June 20, 2024

SUBMISSION ON COERCIVE BEHAVIOUR

The Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment (CCFWE) provides the following submission regarding its review of coercive behaviour in the context of intimate relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 1:** Center survivors with different intersectional realities when leading any developments on coercive control offenses.
- **Recommendation 2:** Recognize the gendered aspect of domestic violence and how coercive control is deeply rooted in gender inequality.
- **Recommendation 3:** Increase funding of services to adequately protect and support victim-survivors before and after separation.
- **Recommendation 4:** Include Economic and Financial Abuse within the context of coercive control and include post-separation abuse in considerations of a coercive control offence.
- **Recommendation 5:** Collect disaggregated data on Economic Abuse as part of coercive behaviour and its impact on survivors.
- **Recommendation 6:** Call Ms. Meseret Haileyesus, Founder and Executive Director of CCFWE, as a witness to speak on her lived experience as a Black survivor and a long-term women's health and economic justice advocate nationally and internationally.

ISSUE

Potential negative impacts of a coercive control offence on survivors

CCFWE agrees with the findings of the [Report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights](#) (2021) that proposing an offence would fill a gap in law that could be used for earlier prevention and intervention, validating victim-survivors' experiences.

However, CCFWE doubts that criminalizing coercive control by itself will achieve the desired outcomes due to existing systemic conditions that exacerbate discrimination against victims seeking justice. CCFWE is very concerned about the risks that the above-mentioned report identifies. Most importantly, **the current intervention and prevention measures are already failing victim-survivors, particularly those of the BIPOC and other marginalized communities, where signs are much more obvious to detect and increased awareness exists.**

Survivors find themselves confronted with systemic societal power structures that shape their experiences of the current legal system as survivors, often part of the BIPOC, disabled, low-income or otherwise marginalized communities.

Experiences from Australia demonstrate the [significant risk of misidentifying Aboriginal women as the primary aggressor](#) in domestic violence cases due to systemic racism among police and the court system. The [Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Death Review](#) found that nearly half of Aboriginal women killed by intimate partners were previously wrongly identified as aggressors by the police. Reporting violence can already be a problematic and traumatic experience for many Indigenous, racialized and other marginalized communities and may be exacerbated by the criminalization of coercive control.

CCFWE believes that more systemic change is needed to have the intended positive effects on women. Before criminalizing coercive control, CCFWE urges the federal government to show its commitment to ending gender-based violence and validating survivor's experiences by adequately funding social services, providing additional shelters and affordable housing, collecting disaggregated data on various forms of coercive control, including Economic Abuse, increase access to legal aid, as well as invest in ongoing training and awareness raising campaigns on the signs and nature of coercive controlling behaviour, amongst other measures.

As a survivor-centred organization, CCFWE strongly recommends that the federal government takes a survivor-centred approach when considering any potential coercive control offence and let survivors with different intersectional realities, such as newcomers, immigrants, gender-diverse people, Indigenous, racialized, disabled, seniors and young women, lead any developments on this issue.

Any legislature should have a trauma-informed, anti-oppressive, and feminist lens if its goal is to validate victim-survivors' experiences. The offence must be based on the notion

that domestic violence and coercive control are rooted in gender inequality and predominantly committed by men against women.

In addition, any definition or guidance for prosecutors on coercive control must encompass the full range of tactics carried out by abusers, including Economic Abuse.

Indicators of coercive controlling behaviour based on our research

Economic Abuse is a common but understudied component of coercive controlling behaviour that limits a victim-survivors' economic independence. Tactics are usually grouped into three categories: employment sabotage, economic control, and economic exploitation.

Economic Abuse leaves individuals financially reliant on their abusers, creating a sense of entrapment that makes escaping the relationship and maintaining autonomy immensely challenging. A lack of access to financial resources is often noted as the main reason why victim-survivors stay in abusive relationships or have to return to them.

While women from all socioeconomic statuses, backgrounds, and identities experience Economic Abuse, [those from racialized, gender-diverse, and other marginalized communities, as well as low-income and educational backgrounds, are at a higher risk of Economic Abuse.](#)

[CCFWE's 2021 research study](#) conducted in the Greater Ottawa region with victim-survivors highlighted that 95% of them reported Economic Abuse, confirming similar findings from the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. The study also found that:

- 86% of victim-survivors were demanded to quit work.
- 93% of their abusers didn't allow them to have their own money and have taken away paychecks and/or financial aid.
- 90% of victim-survivors had decision-making power taken away from them while their abuser made all financial decisions.
- 90% of their abusers demanded information on how money was spent and asked for receipts.
- 90% of victim-survivors couldn't access bank accounts or access to financial information.
- 90% of abusers threatened with physical harm if victim-survivors paid rent or other bills that were needed.
- 84% of abusers had debt built up under the victim-survivors' name.

These examples of reported tactics serve as crucial indicators of coercive controlling behaviour and must be included in any legal or policy measures on this issue.

More research and data collection is needed to fully grasp the prevalence of economic abusive behaviour across Canada.

AUTHOR

About the Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment (CCFWE)

The Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment (CCFWE) is the only Canadian national non-profit organization based in Ottawa dedicated to addressing Economic Abuse and injustice through advocacy, education, research, economic empowerment, and policy change.

CCFWE works collaboratively with organizations and individuals to develop a comprehensive approach that enables domestic violence survivors to recover from Economic Abuse. It also addresses critical policy gaps preventing survivors from recovering and becoming economically secure and independent.

Contact us

Michaela Mayer
Director of Policy, CCFWE
michaela.mayer@ccfwe.org

Meseret Haileyeus
Executive Director
mesi.haileyesus@ccfwe.org

Visit our website: <https://ccfwe.org/>