

**Submission
No 3**

COERCIVE CONTROL IN DOMESTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
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Good morning Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the NSW Government Coercive Control Discussion Paper October 2020. No where in this 75 pages paper has there been any attempt to understand the causes of coercive control in relationships. Nor do any of the references in this 75 pages paper, seek to gain an understanding of abuse and coercive control outside of criminal law policies. What is glaringly missing from this paper are parenting, attachment theory and developmental psychology perspectives on coercive control. Have exactly none of the authors/contributors to this 75 pages paper ever had the experiences of positive parenting according to attachment theory?

It is 2021 and I would hope that this Committee's efforts to help prevent incidents of coercive control is genuine. I hope that this Committee is also aware of the abysmal public policy failures of the so-called war on drugs and war on terror – all policies which criminalise the manifest behaviour without seeking to understand or address the social/biological causes of illicit drug taking or radicalised terrorist acts – and therefore failing abysmally in preventing those acts. Let us not, in 2021, create another category of crimes without the necessary effort to understand the causes – and to actually reduce the incidents of coercive control behaviour. And to not simply create more criminal convictions of people to clog up our criminal justice systems (Parliament, police, lawyers and jails). And in the long term, through a purely criminal justice approach, not in fact prevent - in any sustainable, long term and meaningful ways - coercive control in relationships.

I understand that in 2020, there has been a peak of domestic violence reporting in Australia. Why hasn't criminalising domestic violence over so many past decades resulted in a decrease in domestic violence incidences in our community? This Committee should not ignore this failed public policy approach in criminalising domestic violence by seeking to repeat these same failures in public policy.

To the causes of coercive control. I have no doubt that the NSW Parliament's Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control would have the appropriate resources to consider the reasons why people behave in coercively controlling ways in relationships. The Committee would be able to gain the relevant experts' evidence based research on what causes a person to behave in coercively controlling ways in relationships. I note at:

'9.4 of the Discussion Paper, that 'The NSW Government takes a whole of government approach to responding to and preventing DFV, as articulated in the Blueprint. It reflects a broader policy definition of DFV (see 3.1), taking into account coercive and controlling behaviours. One of the six pillars of the Blueprint is prevention, with efforts focused on changing the attitudes, social norms and structures that underpin DFV, including gender inequality. Other pillars include early intervention, support for victims, and enhanced perpetrator accountability.'

If prevention of coercive control in relationships is the stated goal of this law reform, then the Committee must seek to understand the causes of coercive control in relationships and recommend appropriate programs to address these causes. Otherwise, this discussion paper is unashamedly disingenuous in trying to prevent coercive control in relationships in the community.

To my experiences with abusive behaviours in relationships. My childhood was punctuated by domestic violence from my father and emotional abuse from my mother. When I became a parent, I sought to understand this trauma and to learn different ways of parenting to break this cycle of abuse and to raise independent, resilient and securely attached children. My children are now 8 and 10 years old and I continue learning and working towards this goal. What I have learnt and

experienced over the past 10 years, is that positive parenting supports all children to become emotionally intelligent adults. Inherited parenting rather than evidence based parenting, creates hurt children who in turn become hurt adults – who likely will hurt others (children, spouses, etc).

I understand that in Australia, the age of criminal responsibility is 10 years of age. I wonder if it is the view of this Committee that a 10 year old suddenly develops coercively controlling behaviour at the age of 10 (were a criminal offence be created as a recommendation from this inquiry)? If not at 10, would coercively controlling behaviour develop at 11, 15 or 20, 30 or 40 years of age? What makes a person behave in a coercively controlling manner in a relationship surely must be this Committee's primary objective to understand - if any law reform is to have the effect of preventing coercively controlling behaviour in relationships.

To positive parenting courses. Through the Triple P program, I learnt about positive parenting, setting boundaries, positive discipline and my responsibility and the importance of supporting my children's emotional and physical needs. Through the Tuning into Kids – Emotion Coaching program, I learnt about the importance of supporting my children's emotional development, not dismissing their feelings and teaching them ways to positively express ALL their emotions. Through the Circle of Security program I learnt about the importance of supporting my children's exploration of the world, ensuring they feel secure to do so. Through the Parent Works program, I've understood the importance of time spent with my children and my role to making them feel safe and secure. It is very clear to me that children who have not experienced positive parenting carry much hurt and pain. These hurt children grow up to become hurt adults. And as hurt people hurt people, that pain will manifest itself in countless behaviours including coercive control in relationships.

In order to actually prevent coercive behaviour in relationships, this Committee should seek expert advice to : understand the role of positive parenting in preventing abusive adult behaviour and understand how best to support the development of positive personal skills for people who are prone to coercive control behaviour.

I have no doubt that the majority of submissions to this Committee will be filled with victims and advocates of victims of coercive control in relationships. There will be much outrage along the power imbalance narrative of domestic violence that we have become so familiar with over the past four decades. That abuse is about power, male, privilege power specifically. But the fact remains that decades of this power narrative has failed abysmally to prevent incidents of domestic abuse – with 2020 being a peak in Australia. The power narrative makes good drama for the media, sells books, creates media personalities who parade as advocates for victims and feeds a whole economy of supporting victims. The only thing that the power narrative fails to do – is to in fact prevent incidents of domestic abuse in Australia. Time for a different approach that carefully considers the cause of abuse and how to best heal hurt children who have become hurt adults.

This Committee should not seek to put criminal law practitioners and officers in the middle of a social problem of poor parenting and the resulting adults with ineffective personal skills and sometimes abusive behaviours. Otherwise, this Committee will perpetuate the existing pattern of coercive behaviour in relationships within the community.