

**Submission  
No 16**

## **COERCIVE CONTROL IN DOMESTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

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I wish that coercive control had been made a criminal offence before I became a victim of it because it might have saved me, my children and countless others from the path we ended up on.

Had it been criminal, there would have been greater public understanding. People would maybe have realised that things weren't ok. They may not have been so quick to say "well, you married him." or "you've made your bed, now lie in it" or "how can your husband rape you, when you've already had sex?" or "you need to make it work because you have children together."

If coercive control had been criminalised, there would have been a better understanding of how difficult it is to break away from a relationship that is deeply imbued with emotional abuse yet also interspersed with intense love and the trauma bond would have been recognised and not passed off as 'codependency' which was my fault for being too 'weak'.

If coercive control was criminalised, we would be having the conversation of what is and isn't healthy in a relationship. There would be a much better understanding of the 'red flags' of potential abuse and I and many many others could have made the decision to walk away from a relationship much earlier on, before we became too embroiled and emotionally invested.

If that was the case then I would have been wary when he pushed too hard to take the relationship to the next level. I would not have been caught in a \*whirlwind romance\* where he put me on a pedestal and adored me until we got married and then promptly pushed me off it and vilified me, after the wedding.

I would have realised that when he said we were meant to be together so why wait? There was really no reason to rush.

If coercive control had been a crime, I might have known what economic abuse looked like and seen the warning signs.

Like when he told me that it was better to keep all the bills in my name, because, in the event of his death, it would be better for me and the children not to have our finances tied up in probate. I might not have come out of that relationship with huge debts. I might not have had to live in a house that isn't heated, eating food from the discount aisle and eventually making myself bankrupt whilst he enjoys his carefree life of take-aways, expensive hobbies and foreign holidays.

I might have been more cautious taking out loans for him in my name. Loans that he initially promised to pay back but subsequently refused.

If coercive control had been criminalised, I would have known what 'gaslighting' is and it would not have been so easy to convince me that I put the car keys in the fridge, or that I had misremembered where I had parked the car when, in fact he had deliberately moved it, or that I instigated intercourse and then fallen asleep when I woke up to find him having sex with me. I might have recognised that as rape, instead of thinking that I was an awful person for turning him on and then falling asleep.

If coercive control had been a crime, I might not have believed I was mentally ill, or overreacting, or paranoid, or imagining things, or that my mind was playing tricks on me. I would not have looked to him for reassurance that I'm not going mad. I would have realised that he was deliberately manipulating my reality.

I also would not have believed that the 'mental illness' he had convinced me I was suffering from would be the reason I nearly died.

I would have realised that when he spent two hours screaming at me to "Go on, kill yourself. Everyone hates you, your children hate you, your friends hate you, you're better off dead, go on kill yourself." whilst I was sobbing on the floor and pleading with him to stop, that if I had died, it would not have been my 'mental illness' that killed me, but his abuse.

It would have been murder. Except his hands would have remained clean.

If coercive control had been a crime, he might have been convicted, or maybe the evidence wouldn't have been sufficient to reach the evidential threshold, but there would have been much greater awareness of abuse that is invisible in plain sight and I may have been able to recognise the 'red flags' at the beginning and made the decision to walk away from that relationship before it had become serious. Or maybe not even started that relationship at all.

If coercive control had been a crime, my children might not have watched me be carried on a stretcher and rushed to hospital in an ambulance. My 10 year old may not have told a neighbour that they'll know if God exists if Mummy lives.

I'm crying as I write this because I wish with all my heart that I had known then what I know now as I could have spared my children so much pain. So much trauma could have been avoided but instead, we live with the scars as we strive to forge forwards. If only I'd known the signs because there were so many. I just didn't recognise them. Just didn't know what to look out for.

Coercive control needs to be made a crime. The police won't always get it right, but they must be willing to understand, willing to learn and understand. Victims won't always report, but the option needs to be made available to them and the conversation needs to be around what is and isn't acceptable. What is and isn't a warning sign of something that could get worse. People need to understand when their own behaviours are unacceptable and need addressing and we all need to move our understanding of domestic abuse as being more than a punch to the face after a night in the pub.

Making coercive control a crime can only be a good thing.

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[www.coercivecontrol.co.uk](http://www.coercivecontrol.co.uk)