

**Submission
No 65**

COERCIVE CONTROL IN DOMESTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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Date Received: 29 January 2021

SUBMISSION TO NSW JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON COERCIVE CONTROL

My name is Geraldine Bilston.

I am a victim-survivor who experienced family violence in the context of intimate partner violence that was characterised by coercive control. This was a crime of liberty that deprived my daughter and I of our safety, our freedom, and destroyed who I was.

I have been advocating in the family violence space for a number of years.

I published the attached article 3 months ago, which clearly outlines my own position.

(<https://www.mamamia.com.au/coercive-control/>)

This article has been read over 500,000 times.

My social media platforms and emails have been inundated since with women telling me both their past and present experiences of coercive control.

We all have a basic human right to freedom and safety.

Our government and the family violence sector has a serious responsibility to seek to understand the problems family violence victim-survivors are suffering, and what they need to be able to uphold that right to freedom and safety.

I welcome the opportunity this enquiry is giving for professionals and victim-survivors to put forward differing arguments, experiences, points of view.

I hope to see everyone come together to work towards a solution where the many women reaching out to me are properly supported, and protected.

Kindest Regards,

Geraldine

Geraldine Bilston

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'His comment during my labour shocked the midwife.' Why we need to criminalise coercive control.



This post deals with domestic violence and might be triggering for some readers.

You may have noticed people in Australia have started talking about [coercive control](#), and asking if our government should change our legislation to criminalise this behaviour.

Historically most of us hold a standard picture of what [family violence](#) looks like: as a quiet woman with an abusive husband who comes home drunk and leaves her bruised and battered...

Coercive control includes acts and patterns of behaviour and abuse. Perpetrators (usually men) may do things like monitor their partner's phone, isolate them from their friends and family, limit access to finances, humiliate and gaslight them, and seek to control aspects of who they are and how they live their life.

Unlike the UK, Scotland and Ireland, Australia currently does not have legislation to criminalise this behaviour.

It's been five years since I left my abusive ex-partner, and never have I felt more compelled to lobby for this change in law.

Throughout our relationship, I endured many different forms and acts of abuse.

Once a jovial, happy and energised woman, over many years and while being subjected to verbal, emotional, financial and physical abuse I found myself a shell of who I was.

As time went on throughout this relationship I shrunk into myself. Choosing my words carefully and steadfastly putting on a brave face, so no one would know what I was going through.

The secrecy of what was happening in our relationship meant that I became very quiet about my needs, so quiet that to the world they no longer existed. I was alone in my pain.

I remember being in the midst of hard labour with my daughter. I had hardly spoken but while experiencing the most intense physical pain of my life I managed to say "I need ice". His response was, "say please".

The midwife's face showed horror, but no one in that delivery room spoke a word except for me, and I whispered "please".

He openly and without guilt watched and subscribed to hardcore porn, and some hookup sites. I wouldn't say he flaunted it, but by design, it was easy for me to find. This behaviour fuelled my feelings of inadequacy and left my self-worth in disarray. His login details were always the same... my name.

Being denigrated and abused sexually destroyed me and to this day is something I really struggle with. I'm not sure how to help you understand how I so eagerly loved a man who treated me this way because I don't really understand it myself.

When I finally left, his physical abuse left me bruised and battered, and I wore that pain on my face for three weeks. But what was invisible to the world was that his emotional abuse had broken my heart. His psychological abuse had completely shattered my brain.

This relationship had destroyed me, and I was not sure I would ever be able to put myself back together again.

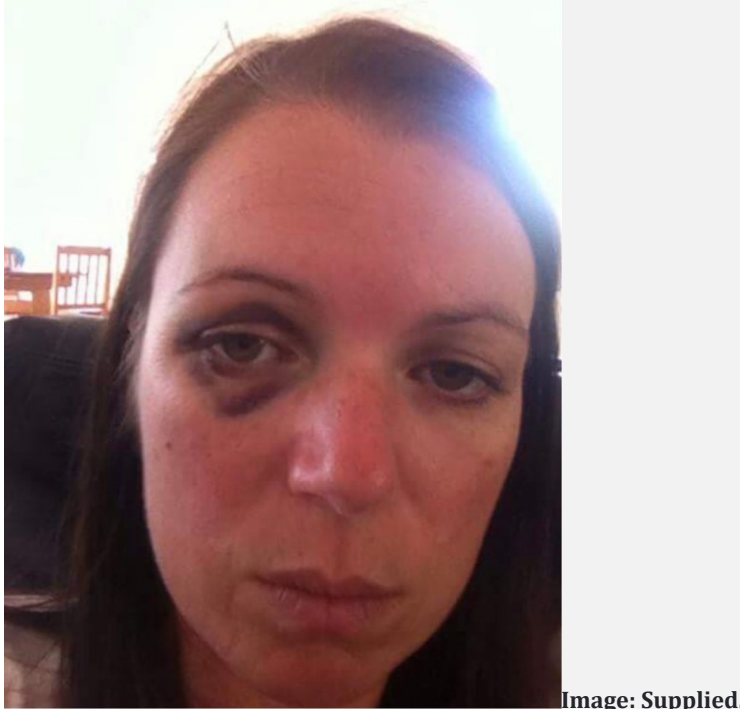


Image: Supplied.

As my face healed and I regained a relative sense of physical safety, I began to put the practical parts of my life back together. Yet, at the same time, I felt like the insides of myself were completely falling apart.

It was a strange thing to have my family and friends around me celebrating my freedom, my happy ending... while the years of torment, and holding myself together, had finally caught up with me.

I would routinely lie on the floor and cry, sometimes for hours at a time. I would sometimes respond to my parents in conversation with things my perpetrator used to say to me, things like "I'm just a useless bitch". My Dad would cry. My Mum asked me what was wrong with me. I should be happy, I was finally free.

All I knew was I was a very broken woman. And I did not know how to put myself back together again.

But this is not just about me. What I'm asking for is not just a change of law, but a change for our whole community.

Earlier this year a woman disclosed to me that her husband weighs her every single day and adjusts her diet accordingly. She was wondering what I thought about that. In that moment, there was little I could offer her, besides a sympathetic ear.

This change in law is important so that we have the ability in horrific cases to be able to prosecute abusers. However, its impact is also broader than that.

We are asking for a wider change; education for police, the judicial system, front line services, and our whole community. Giving victims a way to name this behaviour is important. We also need to be able to deliver a clear message to every single person in our community – that this behaviour, and the abuse of power and control in relationships, is completely unacceptable; it is criminal.

If this post brings up any issues for you, or if you just feel like you need to speak to someone, please call [1800 RESPECT](tel:1800737732) (1800 737 732) – the national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service. It doesn't matter where you live, they will take your call and, if need be, refer you to a service closer to home.

Feature image: Supplied.