

**Submission
No 110**

COERCIVE CONTROL IN DOMESTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Organisation: Country Women's Association of NSW

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Country Women's Association of NSW

*Incorporated in 1931 by an Act of NSW Parliament
Constituent Society of the Associated Country Women of the World*

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03 February 2021

Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control
Inquiry into coercive control in domestic relationships
Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

coercivecontrol@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Committee,

Inquiry into coercive control in domestic relationships

The CWA of NSW welcomes the Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control's inquiry into coercive control in domestic relationships. The CWA of NSW welcomes all public discussion on domestic and family violence, and the NSW Government's commitments to determining the required policy, legal and social responses to DFV and patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour, which are overwhelmingly present in the cases of intimate partner homicide in Australia.

We acknowledge the significant ongoing challenge presented by not only the extremely complex and usually hidden ways in which coercive control perpetrators operate, but also the challenge created where law and in particular evidence law reform is required in what is considered matters of a private and familial nature.

One of the most challenging factors for the NSW Government and the Joint Select Committee is that coercive and controlling behaviour is not any one action or event. It includes non-physical abuse like psychological and emotional abuse, standalone acts of which could even be considered trivial or minor in nature, but when considered cumulatively and over time, has the effect of incrementally and insidiously taking away the independence and freedom of the victim. Coercive control (CC) can take many forms and is largely contextual – what could be considered controlling in one relationship, could be consensual and perfectly normal in another. There is no "hard-and-fast" rule as to what defines CC, which is why these abhorrent acts work so effectively to erode autonomy and independence of the victim.

Acts of CC can include physical or non-physical abuse, deprivation of liberty, isolating the victim, controlling access to resources (including financial), psychological control, manipulation, gaslighting, threats of self-harm/suicide, stalking and intimidation, tracking, assaults or threat of assault, image based abuse (for example "revenge porn"), reproductive coercion, and use of children to manipulate (threats or actual removal of child from mother, for example). From a CWA of NSW perspective, the nature of these acts are exacerbated in rural and remote settings due to isolation and lack of resources and support in rural areas. There is also historically a lot of shame associated with discussing matters of a private nature (such as issues that would be considered DFV and CC) in country communities, which are usually tight-knit, used to being self-reliant, and can be conservative in terms of willingness to seek assistance. Inquiry and public discussion like the one at hand is critical to normalising the discussion, opening up pathways of identification and support for country people, and ultimately removing the power that CC

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perpetrators rely on to be effective.

In 2020, the CWA of NSW confirmed the following policy positions in relation to responding to DFV in the NSW and Australian context:

“That the policy of CWA of NSW shall be to take a strong stance against domestic violence, and implore members of the NSW and Federal Parliament to recognise this issue as a national emergency requiring action.”

“That the policy of CWA of NSW shall be to call for, and encourage all relevant governments to utilise existing research reports and relevant recommendations relating to protecting survivors of domestic violence:

a) Implement the recommendations of the Australian Law Reform Commission review of the family law system, Family Law for the Future 2019

b) Adopt and implement best practice service principles, design and implementation of men’s behaviour change programs as defined by Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS)

c) Adopt and implement existing recognised best practice standards for services responding to domestic violence survivors”.

Following this , in December 2020, the CWA of NSW co-hosted a DFV roundtable, with Domestic Violence NSW. The Attorney General and the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence was in attendance, as well as the Shadow Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Trish Doyle, the Deputy Chair of the Joint Select Committee. The Roundtable focused specifically on DFV in rural , regional and remote (outer-metro) settings, and was attended by a number of service providers in regional NSW who were able to give their invaluable “on-the-ground” experience and suggestions as to what policy and legal reform is required to continue to appropriately respond to this significant challenge.

The recommendations from the CWA of NSW and Domestic Violence NSW roundtable are:

1. Access to DFV services, geographical and social isolation, and lack of infrastructure

- Fund smaller, local community organisations to provide services to their local communities.
- Increase funding to a diverse range of DFV services, including organisations that provide early intervention support, DFV education and case management support for victim-survivors.
- Increase supports for middle aged and older women including by providing community education about DFV, information about supports available and improving cross-sector collaboration between specialist women’s services and DFV services.
- Improve access to supports for families in outer rural areas who face additional barriers.
- Increase investment in DFV-specific counselling and child and adolescent counselling services by Women’s Health Centres.
- Improve access to case management and other supports for First Nations women and women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including women on temporary visas.
- Adopt a public health approach to preventing DFV, including by providing community education to children from an early age.

2. Access to justice – police, justice system and legal supports

- Provide mandatory ongoing and updated DFV training across the NSW Police.
- Fund and resource police to be able to respond quickly to DFV in regional and rural areas.
- Improve access to migration lawyers for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

- Provide safe rooms in all courts.
- Ensure all courts prioritise the safety of women and children and advocate for increased funding to the family court system.
- Enable victim-survivors to have the option to access restorative and transformative justice.

3. Access to affordable housing

- Increase availability of affordable housing and crisis accommodation in rural, regional and outer metropolitan areas, including for older, single women, women on temporary visas, women with disability, women with sons over 14 years of age, and women with animals.
- Provide specific accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

4. Access to accommodation and support for animal and human DFV victim-survivors

- Increase access to accommodation and supports for animal and human DFV victim-survivor including by building animal-friendly accommodation and establishing foster care networks.

Once again we fully support the commitment of the NSW Government to create legal and policy reform in the area of coercive control in DFV in NSW, and the work of the Joint Select Committee. There are no simple answers, however the issues and facts must be brought to light in order to remove the power of CC perpetrators.

We look forward to the Committee's report. Our office can be contacted on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Yours faithfully,

Bronwyn Dunston
Chair- CWA of NSW Social Issues Committee