



# Public Understanding of Coercive Control

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# What's This About?

## Domestic Abuse in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Government Strategy Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland as 'threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, virtual, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability) by a current or former partner or family member'.

During 2020, there were 31,848 domestic abuse incidents recorded by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). This is one of the highest 12-month figures recorded since the data series began in 2004/5.

**Cost:** Economic cost/ Human & health cost/ Cost of late intervention


  
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**Adult experience of mental health outcomes as a result of intimate partner violence victimisation: a systematic review**

Susan Lagdon, Cherie Armour & Maurice Stringer

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**Every Voice Counts**
  
 Policing Response to Intimate Partner Violence in Northern Ireland: Full Report








Susan Lagdon  
 Dr Cherie Armour  
 Professor Maurice Stringer



**If Everybody Helps**
  
 An Evaluation of Domestic Abuse Support Workers (DASW)

Dr Susan Lagdon  
 Dr Caoimhe Ní Dhonail  
 Dr Bethany Waterhouse Bradley  
 Professor Chérie Armour

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# What's This About?

## Coercive Control

Characterised by a pattern of behavior which aims to intimidate, threaten and humiliate a person or restrict a person's liberty, for example by:

- isolating a person from friends and family;
- taking control over aspects of everyday life such as where a person can go and who they can see;
- repeatedly putting a person down; or making threats and intimidating a person to frighten them.
- controlling, regulating or monitoring day-to-day activities
- acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent

Coercive control can impact on victim physical and mental health, with research suggesting that this type of behaviour is associated with future violence.

# What's This About?

## NI Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Bill

During 2020, the Northern Ireland Executive introduced the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Bill which has now passed its final stages in becoming law.

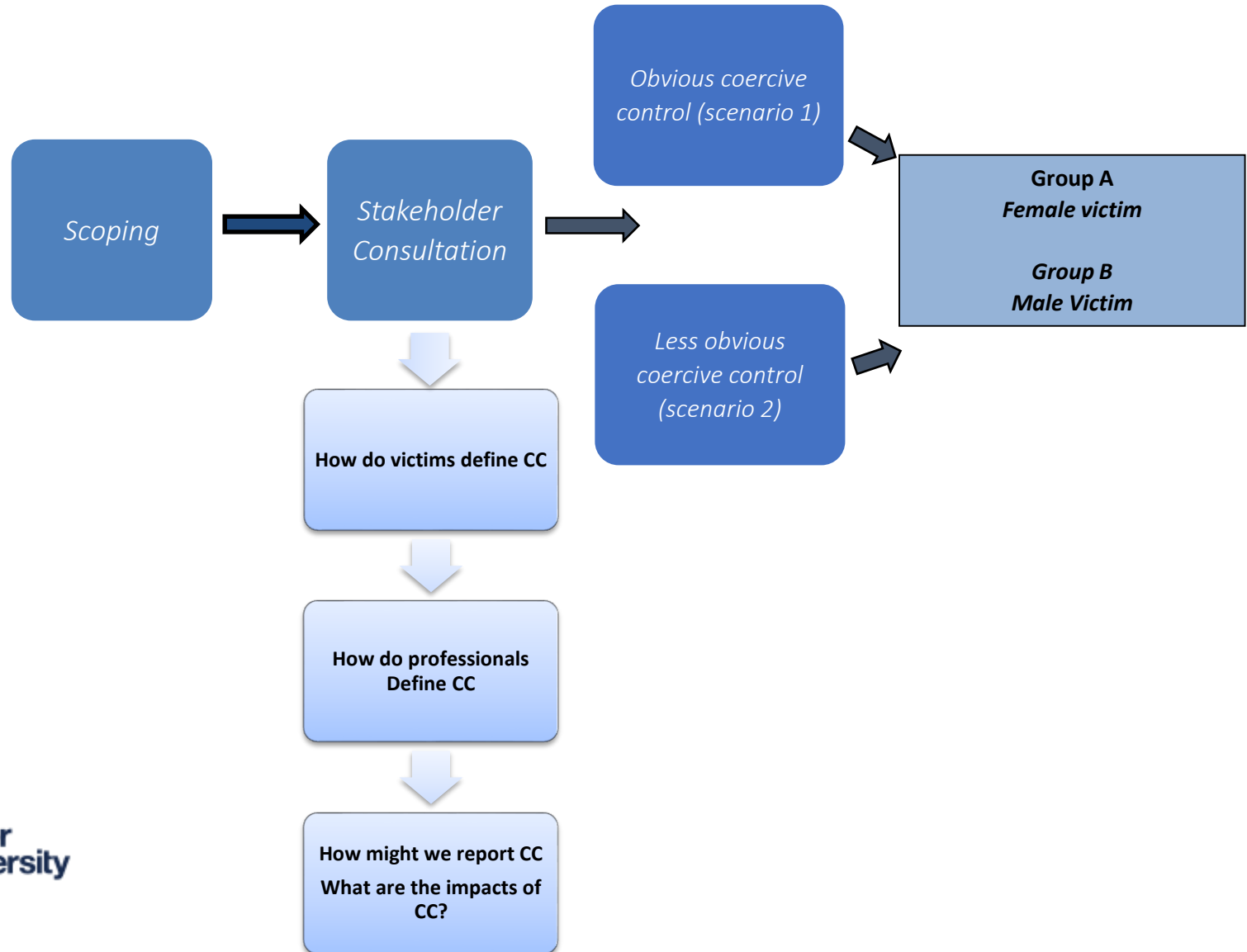
The Bill means that domestic abuse offences in Northern Ireland will no longer be limited to acts of physical violence and makes coercive control an offence.

This offence is expected to be operational within Northern Ireland by the end of 2021. 'A body of work is taking place to ensure that the necessary system and process changes are in place, that training is provided to police and public prosecutors and that the public is also aware of the new offence' (Department of Justice, 2021).

To address the need for evidence-based knowledge to improve public awareness and victim responding to coercive control, a module of questions was included in the 2020 Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey.

# What Did We Do?

## Research Methods & Design



# Obvious Coercive Control

Angela and John have been together for 5 years. After 6 months of being together John began to ask Angela a lot of questions about her online usage and check her social media accounts almost daily. John would get angry at Angela if she had liked the content of her friend's account. Over time, he told her to stop seeing her friends or he would leave her. John would get so angry at Angela that he would smash her phone to the ground in front of her.

After one-year together, John moved Angela out of the town she grew up in into an area 35 miles away so they could enjoy a bigger house and have more privacy. John did not like Angela to visit her parents. John had taken control of their finances so Angela could not buy a train ticket without asking his permission. By the time they had been together three years he would monitor her phone calls to home and cut off the line if the conversation was more than 5 minutes.

John would not let Angela go work and when he left the house, he would lock Angela inside and take the key to work. John told Angela if she left the house he would know and that there would be consequences when he got home. He would hold his fist up whilst saying this. When Angela made dinner and John did not like it, he would smash the plate in front of her and say that she was a useless partner. John would tell Angela daily that she was fat, stupid and that no one else could ever love her but he did. He told Angela that if she ever left him, he would kill her and then himself.



# Less Obvious Coercive Control

Rob and Jane have been together for one year. Rob would come to meet Jane for lunch every day at her workplace. Rob would ask Jane to try clothes on from her wardrobe and then he would tell her what to keep and what to throw out.

Over time he would take Jane shopping and replace her casual look with more smart style dresses, eventually throwing all her clothes out. Rob made an exercise regime for Jane so she could slim down from a size 10 to a 6. He expected Jane to work out 3 times a week every week and he would check her phone apps to see if she had or not.

Every time they go for dinner Rob would insist on ordering Jane's food, as he says that he knows more about good food and calories than she. Rob doesn't like it when Jane talks to other men, even in work, as it's too upsetting for him to imagine what the guys are thinking. Rob generally would insist that Jane cancel plans with friends and family if he can't be there with her. He does not like when he and Jane can't go out together.

# What Did We Ask?

## NILT Questions

10 Questions – Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree / I don't Know

- Attitudes towards coercive controls scenarios
- Attitudes towards Victims
- Talking about coercive control
- Coercive control is a crime

Q 11. Have you heard of the term coercive control, and do you know what it means?

**Sample:** The 2020 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey involved 1,292 interviews with adults aged 18 years or over (Males 40.5%, Females 59.3%)



# RESULTS